



BUNKAI - JUTSU

The Practical Application of Karate Kata

Iain Abernethy

Bunkai-Jutsu: The Practical Application of Karate Kata

**By
Iain Abernethy**

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Above all I'd like to thank my wife Helen for her love, her belief in my work and for providing me with our much-loved son David.

Warning

The methods described and demonstrated in this book are extremely dangerous and must not be attempted by anyone unless they are under expert tuition. Any persons attempting any of the activities described in this book do so entirely at their own risk. The information presented here is done so with the sole intention of helping the reader to better understand the theoretical application of the karate katas. All readers should be aware of, and adhere to, all appropriate laws relating to self-defence.

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Foreword by

Doug James

7th Dan

Over the thirty-five years that I have been involved in karate, there are very few students that, after a few classes on the beginner's course, stand out as having the potential to be an exceptional karateka. Iain was certainly one of those students when, at thirteen years of age, he started training in my dojo, embarking on a journey that was to make a terrific impact on his life.

He rapidly moved through the ranks, particularly excelling in the area of kata. Iain's interest in kata was to become a driving force that inspired him to seek out its real meaning. Iain has always been thirsty for knowledge; questions in the class, training with other martial arts instructors and of course reading (his 'library' is second to none). Iain's desire to understand kata has led to him becoming a successful author and an authority on the fascinating area of karate practice known as 'Bunkai' (kata applications).

I enjoyed reading this book immensely. When a book or article interests me, I find that I can't put it down. I have to read it at every opportunity until I finish it. *Bunkai-Jutsu* is one such book. It is extremely interesting and thought provoking. Iain has gone into great detail to analyse and explain every aspect of the katas and their application in real combat.

Some topics covered in this book may be considered as 'controversial' by some, such as Iain's challenge of the commonly taught kata applications. Many people understand the historical reasons and necessities for those applications, but how many instructors have looked deeper? Whether you agree or disagree with Iain's approach to kata, this book certainly makes a positive contribution to the discussion and expansion of ideas surrounding the 'hidden' meaning of kata techniques. Iain's approach to kata bunkai will make many karate

instructors re-examine how they apply kata techniques, it will make their advanced classes more interesting and it will aid in the exchange of ideas. All positive benefits to be gained from reading this book.

An understanding of 'how and why' we perform and approach kata is essential for a karateka to improve. I had little interest in kata as a young brown-belt, only kumite. Kata was just something you needed for gradings, or so I thought. On attaining my first-dan – like many new black-belts – I asked myself, "*What is kata really all about?*" As I sought a deeper understanding, I found kata practice to be more enjoyable, exciting and my performance of kata just got better and better. As a result of my experiences, I tell my students to 'live' the kata as they perform it. Then, and only then, will they begin to learn its lessons.

By adopting the approach Iain has detailed in this book, the practice of realistic bunkai will make kata practice much more interesting from both the instructor's and student's point of view. This can only be of benefit to the art of karate as a whole, and that is why this book has my endorsement.

I feel very proud of Iain's achievements as an author, and that his training within the Chojinkai organisation gave him the foundation on which to build his ideals. His strength of character and determination, together with his strong values, loyalties, close family and friendships will ensure him more success and guarantee him a bright future within the martial arts.

I have no doubt that Iain will continue to strive for knowledge, expanding and developing his ideas in all areas of the martial arts. After both his first book *Karate's Grappling Methods* and now *Bunkai-Jutsu*, I am sure that there will be many more books to come. I look forward to reading them all with great interest.

Doug James 7th Dan

Introduction

The term 'Bunkai-Jutsu' is taken to mean 'the application of the techniques and concepts of the katas in combat.' The word 'bunkai' literally means 'analysis'. Hence, when people talk about 'kata bunkai' they are referring to an analysis of the kata. However, throughout the karate community 'bunkai' is the common term used to describe the fighting techniques of the kata. The term 'Jutsu' means 'method' and is used in reference to the actual application of techniques in combat, eg 'Kenjutsu' – 'The method of using the sword in combat.' Hence 'Bunkai-Jutsu' can be taken to mean 'the application of the techniques and concepts of the katas in combat.' This book will essentially cover two areas. The first area is the analysis of the katas so that the reader can understand the combative techniques and concepts upon which the katas are based. The second area is the actual application of those techniques and concepts in real combat. It is difficult to discuss both areas separately due to their interdependence. Hence, I decided upon the title of 'Bunkai-Jutsu' for this book as the single term captures both areas of discussion.

The practice of kata is common to the majority of karate styles, and yet kata is without doubt the most misunderstood area of karate practice. Many people practice the katas but most, if they were honest, would be at a loss to tell you why. In the vast majority of today's karate dojos, katas are begrudgingly learnt and practised simply to satisfy grading requirements. When you study the writings of the past masters, you cannot fail to be impressed by the importance they placed upon kata. The founders of karate insisted that kata was the most important part of the art. Today, the karate world is predominately split into two camps. Those that believe kata is an archaic waste of time that should be abandoned, and those that stress the importance of kata, but when asked to justify that importance often resort to simply stating, "*It's traditional.*"

The purpose of this book is to help karateka, who wish to practice karate as an effective and complete system of fighting,

to extract the frighteningly potent techniques contained within the katas. It is hoped that this book will help the reader to understand why the past masters placed so much emphasis on kata training. The katas should not be abandoned or slighted, but embraced, because it is within the katas that you will find some of the most effective unarmed fighting techniques ever developed. The katas are a living record of the art's original methods and it is within the katas you should look if you wish to practice karate in its purest and most potent form.

This book is not simply about showing you what various kata movements are for. Rather, it is hoped that this book will help you to extract the information contained within the katas for yourself. We will discuss the combative concepts associated with the katas so that you will be better equipped to understand the katas themselves. The katas are, after all, nothing but a physical manifestation of these concepts. With an understanding of the combative concepts upon which the katas are based, you will be able to determine the purpose of individual kata movements for yourself. Everything you need to be able to understand and apply the original fighting techniques of karate is recorded within the katas. You just need to be able to access that information.

The amount of information within the katas is vast. All the katas contain strikes, punches, kicks, throws, takedowns, arm locks, chokes, attacks to weak points, strangles, wrist locks, leg locks, neck cranks, ground fighting, weapon defences, footwork, strategy, etc. In the past, it was common for a whole style to revolve around a single kata. The old masters would know, at the most, two or three katas. However, they fully understood that within those katas was all the information they would ever need. Every single kata is a complete system of fighting in its own right! It is hoped that this book will help you to better understand the works of genius that are the katas.

Before we move on to discuss the history and evolution of kata, I'd like to conclude this introduction by offering you my sincere thanks for purchasing this book and for taking the time to read it. I'd also like to thank you for your interest in the application of the katas in real combat. I sincerely hope that this book is of some help to you in your quest to develop your own unique understanding of Bunkai-Jutsu.

Chapter 1

A brief history of kata

Kata has always been an integral part of karate practice. To understand the history and development of kata practice, it is necessary to look at the history and development of karate as a whole.

The recording of information through physical movement is probably as old as mankind itself. Ancient cultures often used sequences of physical movements as a method to pass on their culture to the next generation. Part of this culture would undoubtedly be the fighting and hunting techniques that the group had refined and found to be most successful. Since combat is a physical activity, there can be little doubt that the most effective way for an individual to learn the combative skills of the group would be to copy the physical movements of those who were more experienced. The elders would demonstrate the various combative movements and the younger members of the group would try to emulate them. These skills would eventually be further refined and then passed on to subsequent generations. It is in this way that the first 'katas' would have been created.

It was on the island of Okinawa that the system of fighting that came to be known as karate was developed. Okinawa is one of a chain of islands that are collectively known as the Ryukyu Islands. Okinawa lies five hundred and fifty miles east of Mainland China, approximately halfway between China and Japan.

During the 11th century, a number of Japanese warriors fleeing from the Taira-Minamoto wars made their way to

Okinawa. Many of the Minamoto samurai took Okinawan wives and remained upon the island for the rest of their days. The bujitsu of the Minamoto samurai had a large influence on the fighting methods employed by the Okinawan nobles. One part of Minamoto bujitsu that had an influence on the development of karate was the idea that all motion is essentially the same. Whether striking, grappling or wielding a weapon, the Minamoto samurai taught that all combative methods relied upon similar physical movements. An individual would be taught a particular physical movement and would then be shown how that movement could be adapted to achieve varying goals. The results of this combat philosophy can still be seen in modern day karate. It is not uncommon to see a single movement in a kata to be given several different applications. This use of multiple applications, whilst sometimes controversial, is historically correct. By affording a movement multiple applications the founders of what became known as karate ensured that great amounts of information could be contained in katas of a manageable length. The use of multiple applications also helps ensure a quick response in combat. This is because the practitioner has not learned many different movements for many different situations, which is extremely undesirable as the brain will have to sift through large amounts of information before being able to determine the appropriate movement. Instead, the practitioner will have learnt a relatively small number of movements that can be applied to many situations.

In 1377, the king of Okinawa expressed his allegiance to the emperor of China and this resulted in a huge influx of Chinese culture and customs. Chinese combative systems and ideas were included in this importation of information. It was in 1392 that thirty-six Chinese families emigrated to Kume village in Okinawa as part of a cultural exchange. Amongst these thirty-six families were a number of Kempo experts who had a huge influence on the growth and development of the native Okinawan fighting systems. Over the years, the Chinese transported many of the katas practised within modern karate to Okinawa, and their fighting methods were the inspiration behind many others. Indeed, many of the katas are named after

the Chinese martial artists who created or inspired them, for example Kushanku, Wanshu, Chinto, etc.

In 1429, King Sho Hashi wished to improve the standing of Okinawa and as a result the Okinawan people began to look outward to other countries. This resulted in trade with Indonesia, South-East Asia, Korea, Japan and, of course, China. The towns of Shuri and Naha became famous as trading centres for luxury goods. Later these towns would also gain notoriety for the systems of fighting that bore their names. This influx of trade also led to the exchange of combative ideas that further influenced the native fighting systems and the katas used to record these systems.

In 1477, Sho Shin (the king of Okinawa) imposed a ban on the private ownership and stockpiling of weapons by civilians. In addition, all the nobles were required to live close to Shuri castle. This attempt to control the people of Okinawa had a huge effect on the nature of the native fighting systems. In the majority of fighting systems throughout the world, weapons were always the first choice. No warrior would choose to fight with their bare hands if they could use a weapon. The banning of weapons resulted in the Okinawan people having no other option but to use their unarmed combat skills in the event of attack. Naturally, this acted as a catalyst in the advancement of the island's unarmed fighting systems.

The moving of the nobles close to Shuri castle also had an effect on the development of karate. It was common practice throughout the world for kings to keep nobles close at hand. This made the organising of meetings etc a great deal easier and ensured that the families of the various nobles were within hostage-taking distance. This would ensure loyalty to the king and could be used as a strong negotiating tool in the event of any disagreements. The nobles would also be granted favours and social status for their loyalty and service. Many of the nobles would practice martial arts to ensure that they had the skills needed to maintain order and to protect the king should the need arise. Strong fighting skills would be acknowledged and rewarded by the king. Hence, the practice of martial arts was strongly encouraged amongst the nobles. It was, therefore, the upper classes of Okinawa that were predominately responsible for the cultivation and development of karate, and

not, as is commonly thought, the lower classes. The upper classes of Okinawa would actively seek out instruction in the martial arts and had the resources and opportunity to do so, as afforded them by their position. This resulted in the further development and formation of family styles based upon Chinese Kempo.

In 1609, Japan was ruled by the Tokugawa shogunate, which maintained power through the skilful playing off of one faction against another. The Tokugawa clan had previously subjugated the Satsuma clan but they still considered them to be a threat, and hence they were sent to invade Okinawa. This would ensure that the Satsuma samurai were out of the way and it had the added bonus of punishing the Okinawans for failing to supply Japan with the supplies it required for a previous attack on China. The invasion was successful and once again the Okinawans were prohibited from possessing weapons. Any Okinawan found in possession of a weapon would be severely punished. This attempt to subjugate the Okinawan people resulted in many clashes between the Okinawans and the Satsuma samurai. The Okinawans had no option but to rely on their unarmed fighting skills in addition to the combative use of domestic and fishing tools. Various laws were imposed by the Japanese to eradicate all traces of the Okinawan fighting systems. This resulted in karate being practised in secret for fear of being discovered. This had a profound effect on karate. The katas and, in particular, their applications, became further shrouded in secrecy. A kata and its combative applications would only be revealed to the most trusted student. The effects of this are still felt today because the original meanings of some kata movements will have gone to the grave with the kata's early practitioners. An additional effect of secrecy was that karate became extremely violent, as its only purpose at that time was to quickly disable any assailant.

The Satsuma clan maintained control over Okinawa for nearly three centuries until Okinawa officially became part of Japan. The system of fighting employed by the Satsuma samurai was Jigen-Ryu Bujitsu. Some of the Okinawan nobles were instructed in this system and hence it will have had an influence on the native traditions. Indeed, Bushi Matsumura (a karate master who was employed by the king of Okinawa as a

bodyguard) gained his teaching certificate in Jigen-Ryu. It is Matsumura who is accredited with synthesising Jigen-Ryu with Chinese and indigenous Okinawan systems to form what became known as the Shuri-te style of karate.

From what we have seen so far we can conclude that karate is a synthesis of many different fighting systems. Okinawa's unique position in the world and the various bans on weaponry made it the ideal place for a highly effective system of unarmed combat to develop. Over many centuries the Okinawans had the opportunity to study a wide range of differing combative traditions and take the most effective techniques and concepts from each to form a uniquely efficient system. Not only did the Okinawans have the means, but they also had the motivation. Whilst in other cultures the development of effective unarmed fighting skills would take second place to the development of weapon skills, the Okinawans were not afforded this luxury. It is also important to understand that the Okinawan fighting systems were closely guarded secrets.

Many of the katas practised at this time were Chinese in origin, but they would have been influenced by the techniques and concepts gleaned from fighting systems originating in other parts of the world. The Okinawans also developed katas to record their own fighting systems. The only purpose of kata at this point in history was to record highly effective and brutal methods of combat, and to provide a training method to perfect those methods. However, things were soon to change. As modern karate practitioners who desire effective combat skills, we need to be aware of these changes.

The Tokugawa shogunate was abolished in 1868 as Japan moved from feudalism to democracy. During this time, the Japanese abandoned many aspects of their culture that were attached to feudalism. The class structure, the wearing of swords by samurai, the styling of the hair into the 'top-knot' etc was all to be abolished. However, the Japanese authorities were keen to continue to foster many of the values associated with the past. It was felt that the practice of martial arts would promote health, would develop a strong spirit and encourage morality in the Japanese people. It was also felt that martial practice would help the Japanese to maintain a sense of national identity in the wake of political change and foreign

influence. The ministry of education supported the development of 'sporting' martial arts that continued to foster the values associated with bushido. Hence, arts such as judo and kendo were strongly promoted in Japan's education system. It was also felt that the healthy bodies and strong spirits developed through the practice of budo would be an aid to Japan's growing army.

In 1891, during their medical examination for recruitment into the army, the exceptional physical condition of two young karateka (Yabu Kentsu and Hanashiro Chomo) was noted. As a result, the military enquired as to whether karate would be an aid to the Japanese war machine, as judo and kendo had been. This idea was ultimately abandoned due to the disorganisation of the karate fraternity, the length of time it took to become competent, and because of fears that the Japanese troops may use their newly found skills in brawls. However, at the turn of the twentieth century, a group of karate practitioners campaigned to have karate put on the Okinawan school system's curriculum, in the belief that young men with healthy bodies and moral character would be far more productive in Japanese society.

In 1901, the great 'Anko' Yasutsune Itsou (1830–1915) campaigned successfully to get karate added to the physical education program of the Shuri Jinjo Elementary School. As it stood, Itsou believed karate to be too dangerous to be taught to children and set about disguising the more dangerous techniques. As a result of these modifications, the children were taught the katas as mostly blocking and punching. Itsou also changed many of the more dangerous strikes (taisho, nukite, etc) into punches with the clenched fist. This enabled the children to gain such benefits as improved health and discipline from their karate practice without giving them knowledge of the highly effective and dangerous fighting techniques that the katas contain. In 1905, Itsou was appointed as karate teacher to the prefectural Dai Ichi College and the prefectural teachers' training college. In 1908, Itsou wrote a letter to the education department outlining his views on karate and asking that it be introduced onto the curriculum of all Okinawan schools. Itsou was granted his wish and karate became part of the education of all Okinawan children.

Itsou's modifications resulted in huge changes to the way the art was taught. The emphasis was now placed firmly on the development of physical fitness through the group practice of kata. The children would receive no instruction in the combative applications associated with the katas and deliberately misleading labels were adopted for the various techniques. Today, it is Itsou's terminology that is most commonly used throughout the world and it is important to understand why this terminology developed.

It is important to remember that many of the names given to kata movements have no link with the application of that movement. Terms such as 'Rising-block' or 'Outer-block' stem from the watered down karate taught to Okinawan school children, and not the highly potent fighting art taught to the adults. When studying bunkai, be sure that the label does not mislead you. Itsou's changes also resulted in the teaching of kata without its applications. The traditional practice had been to learn the kata and when it was of a sufficient standard (and the student had gained the master's trust) the applications would be taught. However, it now became the norm to teach the kata for its own sake and the applications might never be taught (as is sadly still the case in the majority of karate schools today).

Itsou is often criticised for 'blunting' karate due to the changes he instigated, but I feel this is grossly unfair. At that time, karate was essentially a dying tradition and had Itsou not ensured that it adopted the modern characteristics, which had already been taken onboard by judo and kendo, karate may well have died out altogether. Itsou will have had no idea that his 'children's karate' would become the world's most popular martial art. Hence, he would not have known what a profound effect his changes, and the changes of those who followed him, were to have. The majority of today's karate practitioners practice the art in the children's way and not as the effective combat art it was originally intended to be. Indeed, Itsou himself encouraged us to be aware of this difference. In 1905 Itsou wrote, "*You must decide whether your kata is for cultivating health or for its practical use.*" Itsou was an extremely talented fighter who encouraged his adult students to "*Always practice kata with its practical use in your mind.*"

In the mid 1930s, Gichin Funakoshi (a student of Itsou's and the founder of Shotokan karate) led a movement to gain karate national recognition from Japan's leading martial arts association, the Butoku-Kai. After numerous meetings and demonstrations, karate was finally granted national recognition, but there were a number of conditions attached. The Butoku-Kai insisted that karate develop a unified teaching curriculum, distance itself from its Chinese origins, adopt a standard training uniform (a lightweight judo gi was decided upon), assign a system of ranking (the Kyu-Dan grade system of judo), develop a system of competition and to further reduce some of the more violent methods employed.

Funakoshi and his group were successful in these tasks and karate gained national recognition and hence continued to spread. These changes were vital if karate was to continue to grow, but again they had a negative effect on the combative aspect of the karate katas. The more potent techniques and methods contained within the katas were further obscured because of concerns at the brutality employed. The birth of competition and the grading system eventually resulted in many practitioners being predominately concerned with the look of the kata in order to win trophies and pass exams. Competitive sparring also resulted in karate beginning to focus on the defeat of other karateka in competition, as opposed to the defeat of a violent and untrained attacker in actual combat. I would again caution the reader against viewing these changes in a negative light. Certainly they had a negative effect on the effectiveness of the art with regards to the way it was practised. However, if these changes had not been made, it is extremely unlikely that karate would ever have left Okinawa, if it survived at all! These changes ensured the survival of karate and the katas associated with it. The katas contain all the principles and methods of the original fighting art. If we wish to practice the original karate, all we need to do is alter the way we approach the katas.

In conclusion, the unique culture on the island of Okinawa created an environment in which effective unarmed fighting skills would develop. The katas are a record of highly effective fighting techniques and concepts that were developed and refined after exposure to many systems. However, various historical events – although vital for the survival of karate –

have resulted in the combative applications of the katas becoming obscured.

It is hoped that after reading this chapter you are more aware of the evolution of kata and some of the issues associated with understanding their applications.

Chapter 2

Performing the katas

In this chapter, we will look at the actual performance of the katas. Within the katas we can find many highly effective fighting techniques and principles. However, we can only access those techniques and principles if the kata is of a sufficient standard. As an analogy, if some information is written down with great care such that all the spelling, punctuation etc is correct, then that information will be easily understood by anyone who reads it. However, if the information is poorly recorded (words spelt incorrectly etc) then that information will be lost in whole or in part. It is the same with kata. We need to ensure that the katas are correctly practised and taught if information is not going to be lost. It is also important that the katas are correctly 'recited' so that they can be fully understood. A major part of kata are the thoughts and emotions that should be honed and experienced during practice. If the katas themselves are insufficiently learnt and poorly performed then the rest of the information in this book will be of little use, as the foundation will not have been correctly laid. Kata has to be correctly learnt, performed, understood, interpreted and expressed if it is to reveal its secrets.

The founders of karate created the katas in order to pass on the techniques and skills needed to protect ourselves from violent assault. Kata does bring the karateka many other benefits besides effective fighting skills. These benefits include such things as improved health, greater mental and physical control, a greater understanding of self, enhanced self-confidence, discipline etc, but these benefits, worthwhile

though they may be, are not kata's primary purpose. The primary purpose of kata is to enable us to inflict pain upon our aggressors in response to unprovoked acts of violence. Some people do not care for this view and talk of how the performance of a perfect kata can be an end in itself. A Rolls Royce that does not start up may look beautiful, but it could not be described as perfect because it cannot perform the task it was designed to do. Likewise, the katas were designed for use in combat and, therefore, I fail to see how a kata that cannot be used in combat can ever be described as 'perfect,' regardless of how visually pleasing it may be. Gichin Funakoshi in his book *Karate-Do Kyohan* states, "*Once a form has been learned, it must be practised repeatedly until it can be applied in an emergency, for knowledge of just the sequence of a form in karate is useless.*" If a karateka is unable to use the kata effectively then, in my opinion, what they are practising is not fit to be called kata.

Everything that is needed to survive a violent assault should be rehearsed and refined during kata practice. This includes not only the techniques themselves but also the correct mental attitudes. All too often we see great emphasis being placed on ensuring that the limbs etc are in the correct positions whilst none is placed on what the student should be thinking and feeling. This type of practice leads to katas that are hollow and this must be avoided at all costs. The katas should be complete mental and physical exercises that enhance the student's fighting ability every time they are practised. For clarity, we shall discuss the physical and mental aspects of the katas separately. However, it is important to understand that both aspects are dependent upon one another and cannot be separated in practice.

Learning the katas

Kata is something that must be learnt from a qualified and knowledgeable teacher. Although books and videos can enhance understanding and aid memory, they are no substitute for proper instruction. Your choice of instructor will be the most important decision you make with regards to your karate. Do not make it lightly or base your decision on such superficial things as the distance from your home or cost. The important

thing is how good the instructor can make you, as opposed to how good they are. You require a Sensei, not a bodyguard. Visit a number of dojos and look at the standard of the students, the way they are dressed and their attitudes to one another as well as to the instructor. What qualifications does the instructor have? Are there separate classes for beginners, intermediates and advanced? Are there adequate first aid facilities? etc. The Sensei/student relationship is a special one. If you find a Sensei with a deep understanding of karate and a genuine love of the art, and if you are prepared to study hard with dedication, openness and honesty, then you are sure to make good progress in all aspects of karate.

How you are taught the katas will be a matter for your teacher. It is common for the kata to be taught in stages. For example, the first few moves will be taught, then when the student has a reasonable grasp of them, they will be shown the next couple, and so on until the whole sequence is remembered. The techniques will then be further refined as the emphasis shifts to timing, rhythm, correct use of strength, etc. As the student progresses, the corrections will become more and more finite as they strive for the unattainable goal of perfection. Once the kata is of a satisfactory standard, the student should begin to receive instruction on the applications of the movements. Understanding the applications will improve the student's performance of the kata. As the student's performance of the kata improves so will their ability to apply the techniques. This spiralling effect should be at the heart of kata practice. When the Sensei is happy with the student's kata, they will then be allowed to move on to study the next one. It is far better to have a good understating of one kata than a superficial understanding of many. Do not rush when learning the katas or be in a hurry to move on to the next one. Take your time and always emphasise quality over quantity.

One of the accusations commonly directed at kata practice is that it is 'boring'. Part of the problem is that few people understand kata and as a result the students fail to see any value in its practice. Another problem is the constant repetition that is required for competence to be achieved. I am sure that the world's best sprinters have at some point in their career got bored running up and down the track. Top golfers probably get

bored practising their putting, and Olympic weight lifters get bored of lifting weights. Yet these people possess the necessary mental strength to continue to practice. Long after others became 'bored' and stopped practising, they can be found still working and that is why they are at the top of their field. Everyone wants to be good and yet only a few are prepared to put in the work that is required to achieve high skill levels. Get a good teacher, gain a good understanding of the katas, take on board any criticisms and practice relentlessly if you want your katas, and indeed all aspects of your karate, to be of a high standard.

Variations

The exact ways in which the katas are performed varies from style to style and even from instructor to instructor. Variations due to forgetfulness, insufficient study, poor technique, laziness, etc, are obviously undesirable. However, this does not mean that all variations are unacceptable. Every one of us is different and it is impossible for everybody to perform the katas in exactly the same way. A short and stocky person's kata will be different to a tall and thin person's. Not better or worse, just different. That said, it is up to the individual to try to adapt themselves to the kata and not the other way around. An overweight person should lose weight, a stiff person should increase their flexibility and a weak person should increase their strength rather than use their current condition as an excuse for poor performance. Making excuses requires no effort, making progress requires plenty, and that is why most people opt for the former. We are all individuals with differing attributes so some variation is inevitable. So long as these variations do not erode the underlying principles of the kata and occur through Shuhari then they can be looked upon as acceptable, perhaps even desirable.

The concept of Shuhari is best explained by splitting the word up into its component parts. 'Shu' means to copy the techniques and teachings of the instructor as closely as possible. Great attention should be placed on even the smallest of details so that good form is developed. 'Ha' refers to the freedom permitted for subtle changes that will inevitably occur due to variations in physiques combined with the student's own

experiences and understanding of karate. 'Ri' is when the karateka has mastered the techniques to the point where they are no longer 'techniques' as such, but become part of their being. The karateka will adapt and change their actions to perfectly match the circumstances. Shuhari is the vehicle for karate's evolution and hence its survival.

Today, there is often a rivalry between various schools or styles, with each professing that their particular way of doing things is the best. Whilst there is nothing wrong in having pride in one's particular school, I feel that when this pride leads to a derogatory attitude to other groups or styles it is harmful to karate as a whole. The idea of 'styles' was a distasteful concept to many of the past masters, who preferred to view all karate as one. In *Karate-do: My Way of Life*, Gichin Funakoshi (founder of Shotokan) wrote, "*There is no place in contemporary karate-do for different schools...I have heard myself and my colleagues referred to as the Shotokan School, but I strongly object to this attempt at classification. My belief is that all these 'schools' should be amalgamated into one so that karate-do may pursue an orderly and useful progress into man's future.*" Kenwa Mabuni (founder of Shito-Ryu) once said, "*There are no styles of karate-do, just varying interpretations of its principles ...People seem to place too much emphasis upon this style or that style, this teacher or that teacher, winning and losing. This has nothing to do with karate's ultimate aim.*"

When talking about kata, the following analogy may help you to understand that, regardless of style, all karateka practice essentially the same thing. Two people are to write down the same poem. One uses a computer and prints out the poem in black block capitals on brilliant white paper. The other writes it down in their normal handwriting, using a red pen on a crumpled piece of brown paper. Whilst the two poems will look very different at first glance, closer examination will reveal that the information contained is identical. It is the same with regards to the differing ways in which the various styles or schools perform the katas. Shotokan's Tekki may look very different to Wado-Ryu's Naihanchi but they are based upon the same concepts and contain the same information. It is far better to concentrate on understanding the common principles upon

which all karate rests, rather than obsess about what are essentially superficial differences.

Technical/physical components

As previously explained, the ways in which the katas are performed vary from style to style. However, all karate styles adhere to a common set of principles. These principles are merely good physics and, as such, must not be deviated from if effectiveness is to be attained.

There are no superfluous movements in kata, nor should any be added. Be sure that all techniques are performed with the minimum amount of movement. For example, do not let the elbows flap when the fists are held on the hip, do not hunch the shoulders when punching, do not rock forwards and backwards when moving from stance to stance etc. Assume all stances smoothly and be sure to maintain good balance at all times. It is especially important not to bob up and down when assuming stances. It is said that when performing kata the 'hara' must be kept weighted down. The hara is traditionally thought to be the point from which the 'Ki' or 'life force' originates. This point is located approximately four centimetres below the navel, half way between the belly and the spinal column. It is up to the individual to decide if they subscribe to a belief in Ki. Personally, I do not. The hara does have a vital role to play in the performance of kata, however, because its location is the centre of gravity for the human body. It is important to keep the hara in mind when practising the katas so that body weight is transferred efficiently. All movements should originate from the hara. This is nothing mystical but merely the sound application of the laws of physics.

When assuming a stance be sure to achieve the correct weight distribution. Although the stances vary slightly from style to style, the correct distribution of body weight is vital in order to facilitate the application of the techniques. Make sure that the feet are correctly positioned. In particular, be sure that the edges of the feet are firmly on the floor when in long stances. The stances are a vital part of the techniques and great attention must be given to them.

All techniques should be applied using the entire body. A punch that relies solely on the muscles of the arms will have a

minimal effect. It is the body movement that generates the power. The limbs are simply used to transfer that power into the opponent. All parts of the body must be co-ordinated and come together at the correct moment if the blow is to be effective. This convergence of forces is referred to as 'kime' (focus).

Be sure that the techniques are executed with accuracy. If a punch is meant to be delivered at solar plexus height then it must be exactly that, not even so much as an inch either way. A strike to a weak point on the opponent's body will have a far greater effect than one that hits a stronger area. Practising the katas in an exact fashion will help to enhance muscle control, improve accuracy and ensure that the techniques are as effective as possible.

The muscles should tense briefly at the end of each technique. The reason for this momentary tension is to protect the joints. For a blow to have the greatest possible effect it must hit the target at maximum speed. If the limb was to carry on moving at high speed then injuries such as hyper-extended elbows could occur. Just before the limb is fully extended the muscles contract so that the limb decelerates in as short a time as possible. Without this type of muscular contraction, the limb would have to start to slow down sooner (if damaged joints are to be avoided) and this would seriously reduce the effect of the blow. A common mistake is for the muscles to contract harder and longer than is actually required. This unnecessary muscular contraction will result in premature fatigue and can slow the delivery of the techniques. Once a technique has been executed the muscles must relax instantly so that the limb is ready to move again. It is important to remember that in kata, as in fighting, there are times to be hard and times to be soft. Using muscular strength indiscriminately is the sign of an inexperienced karateka.

Punches and kicks should be delivered with speed in order to increase their chances of success and their effect. When performing quick movements in the katas, be sure to move as quickly as possible in order to increase the speed with which you can deliver your techniques. To develop strength you would lift slightly more weight than you can comfortably manage at present. In order to develop fast techniques, you

should try to move slightly quicker than you presently can. Merely plodding through the movements will do little to increase your speed.

Be sure not to rush the kata. Ensure that every movement is fully completed before moving on to the next one. Each kata has its own distinct rhythm, the pauses between some movements are long and others are short. In music it is not only important to play the right notes, they must also be played at the right time. It is the same with kata. Do not perform the kata at a steady pace but vary the tempo as appropriate.

Breathing is another important part of kata practice. Air should be exhaled as the techniques are executed. This exhalation should come from the diaphragm and not be excessively noisy as in a grunt or a snort. The breathing must be synchronised with the techniques, otherwise they will become weak and you will tire quickly.

Mental components

In combat it is absolutely vital that the correct mental attitudes are adopted. It will not be the most technically competent person that wins the fight but, more often than not, it will be the one with the strongest mind.

Kiai

Kiai is often thought of as merely being a shout, but this is not correct. Kiai is the convergence of all your energies at a single instant that ensures your goal is attained. True kiai is a feeling of great power, you feel so good that you cannot help but make a noise. An explosion will make a loud noise, but a loud noise is not an explosion. Likewise kiai (which is also a release of energy) is often accompanied by a loud noise, but simply shouting is not kiai. Through the constant repetition of a technique it is possible to reach a point where the technique is so good that you know that no matter how much the opponent resists, or how skilful they are, or how extreme the circumstances, the opponent will be powerless against it. Defeating an opponent with such a perfect technique will be an event of great beauty that will make the victor feel exalted. This feeling of exaltation and perfection is kiai. The resulting shout is simply a likely physical response to this feeling. Only

winning through perfection will bring about kiai. A victory through any other means will bring about a feeling of relief. When practising kata it is the feeling of power and perfection that is kiai that we should attempt to develop. If you have an unshakeable belief in both yourself and your ability to apply the techniques of the kata, regardless of the circumstances, then your kata will possess kiai. A shout uttered as a result of kiai is blood curdling to those who hear it.

There is a famous tale of the karate master Matsumura defeating an opponent using only his kiai. Matsumura's kiai so terrified his opponent that he was unable fight. A shout that is not the result of kiai will have a hollow ring to it and will often result in amusement rather than fear. The shout itself should come from the abdomen as opposed to the throat and will have a differing sound from person to person. A common mistake among beginners is to shout the word "*kiai*". Today, there are set places in the katas at which to shout. This was not always the case. Originally a student was left to kiai when it was felt to be appropriate. Your instructor will tell you where in the kata they wish you to shout. Practice so that these shouts are the result of kiai and not just empty grunts.

Aiki

The other side of kiai is 'aiki'. When an opponent is helpless against your techniques you will feel kiai. The opponent, realising the futility of his actions, will feel aiki. Aiki can be described as 'winning without striking a blow' or 'dominating spirit'. Feeling aiki will cause an opponent to doubt their own skills and to resign themselves to a crushing loss. If, in combat, you can break the opponent's spirit so that they lose their will to fight, you are guaranteed victory. A person who possesses high skill levels and an unshakeable belief in their ability can cause aiki in their opponents with as little as a glance. In the classic text *The Art of War*, Sun-Tzu states, "*Achieving victory in every battle is not absolute perfection; neutralising an adversary's forces without battle is absolute perfection.*" The concept of aiki can make this high ideal into a reality, as any opponents would avoid conflict due to the realisation that any attack would be futile. A high quality kata will cause aiki in those who witness it. A kata should be a beautiful yet terrifying

spectacle. Pulling 'mean' faces and shouting loudly will not cause aiki. Only if the performer is truly in possession of strong fighting skills, and they have the necessary mental qualities to apply those skills, will aiki be the result.

The concepts of kiai and aiki should not be confused with arrogance. Kiai and aiki will occur because the karateka is, in all reality, so highly skilled as to be unbeatable in that particular situation. They will not occur through delusions of grandeur. All martial artists should aspire to be humble beings and as such it should be our aim to actually acquire such high skill levels and not to just be so arrogant that we think we have! Kiai and aiki are high ideals, but they are ones to which we must aspire. When performing the katas try to project kiai through your actions, thoughts, feelings and eyes so that your ability to dominate your opponents through the concept of aiki is enhanced.

Zanshin

Zanshin is another important aspect of kata. Zanshin refers to a state of enhanced awareness that should exist before, during and after a technique is executed. A person in a state of zanshin will be totally aware of their surroundings and prepared for anything. The instant the opponent decides to attack, the person with zanshin will be aware of their intentions and will act accordingly. During an exchange, a person who possesses zanshin will know exactly what needs to be done to win and afterwards they will remain alert in case of any further aggression. A person without zanshin will not know that an attack is imminent until it is too late, will have no idea what is required during the fight and, should they be lucky enough to survive, will be vulnerable to further attacks once the initial exchange is concluded.

Zanshin is a vital part of successful fighting. If you are not aware of all aspects of the situation you will have insufficient information upon which to base any decisions. Hence, you are very likely to act inappropriately. With regards to self-defence, it is important to be in a state of awareness before, during and after the fight. Kata is all about preparing for real fights and you must, therefore, also be in a state of awareness before, during and after the kata. You would be foolish to conclude a fight

and then let your awareness drop as this will leave you vulnerable to further assaults. You would be equally foolish to rehearse something that could cause you harm during kata. You must finish the kata with your zanshin intact so that any further attacks (whether they are real or imaginary) can be appropriately dealt with. Good zanshin will enable you to avoid violent situations altogether, which should be the aim of all true martial artists. When performing the katas remain alert and do not let your thoughts wander elsewhere. Kata practice should aid the development of zanshin, which will in turn further enhance your fighting skill.

Mushin

The mental quality of mushin will also be developed through correct kata practice. 'Mushin' means 'no mind' and refers to a mind that is open and that is not fixed upon any particular object or thought.

It is common for the mind to become cluttered during combat with thoughts such as "*I do not want to get hurt,*" "*I shall try this technique next,*" "*I am winning,*" "*They are winning,*" "*I am in pain,*" etc. A mind that is cluttered with such thoughts will be unable to fully devote itself to the task at hand and as a result will seriously hamper the effectiveness of any actions. The mind must be free of any clutter so that all actions are executed with one hundred percent efficiency. When first learning a kata it is common for the student to constantly think of which move is coming next. It is also common for thoughts such as, "*This is feeling weak,*" "*This is feeling strong,*" "*I am tired,*" "*The next sequence is difficult,*" etc, to enter the mind during a kata. These thoughts must be avoided so that, after many years of practice, it will be possible for the karateka to perform the kata with little or no thought. This is not to be confused with day dreaming. The mind should be wholly present to the point were the karateka is not performing the kata but is the kata! When practising the katas be sure to avoid all extraneous thoughts so that mushin may be developed and enhanced.

Courtesy and humility

Another vitally important and often overlooked aspect of kata are the concepts behind the opening and closing bows. These

bows signify that karate begins and ends with courtesy and reminds the karateka to always be polite and humble in their interactions with others. These bows should not be empty gestures, but the result of a genuine feeling of respect for the art of karate, oneself and others. A true karateka should be a person of paradox, who is not only capable of dealing with extreme violence but who is also kind, gentle and humble.

Correct interpretation

When performing a kata it is important to remember that its purpose is to prepare you for combat. Kata is not to be used to impress others. It is common to see karateka alter the kata so that kicks that were low are now performed at head height, or worse still, straight up. Your only aim when engaged in combat is to defeat the enemy. Looking good should never be a consideration. Whilst the practice of head-height kicks can increase power and flexibility, you would be unwise to use them in a high-risk situation. Kata should be a rehearsal for real situations and as a result high kicks have no place within them.

Another common mistake is for stances to be far too deep. Stances are there to serve a purpose and should never be deeper than the particular style being practised dictates. Be sure to interpret the kata in a practical fashion as opposed to a theatrical one. There should be no difference between the way you approach kata and the way you approach combat. The kata must be 'real' to the point where the opponents actually exist in your mind. You must have no doubt that the techniques you are performing are actually inflicting pain upon your enemies. If you truly believe in the reality of your kata it will be reflected in your performance. Your kata will be 'alive'. Learning 'what goes where' is a relatively simple task compared to bringing the kata to life in this fashion. Master Itsu (creator of the Pinan/Heian katas), when outlining his philosophy of karate to the Prefectural Education Department wrote, "*During practice you should imagine you are on the battlefield. When defending and attacking you should make your eyes glare, drop the shoulders and harden the body. Now thwart the enemy's advance and strike! Always practice with this spirit so that, when on the real battlefield, you will naturally be prepared.*" Be sure to put this advice into practice.

When practising kata we are walking in the footsteps of some of the greatest fighters that have ever lived. If we perform the katas correctly we gain the opportunity to learn from the great masters of the past and perhaps even gain a small part of their skills.

Chapter 3

The rules of bunkai

In this chapter we are going to look at the keys needed to unlock the information contained within the karate katas. You need to understand the 'language' of kata in just the same way that you would need to understand the language of a foreign text if you were to be able to appreciate the information that was recorded within that text. When you are analysing a particular kata movement it is vital that you keep the following rules in mind. In this way, any application that you attribute to a kata movement – which may or may not be what the kata's formulator had in mind – will be effective and consistent with traditional principles. We will expand on some of these rules in later chapters.

1. Each kata is a stand-alone self-protection system

It is sometimes said that a particular kata is for a particular purpose, for example defending yourself against a staff attack, fighting on a boat etc. It must be understood that each and every kata was intended to be applied as a stand-alone self-defence system. They were not designed to be used in conjunction with all the others (although there is no reason why they could not be). Each kata records the fighting techniques and principles of the person who created it.

As an example, if we look at Naihanchi/Tekki kata it becomes apparent that the kata is a complete system of fighting. Naihanchi/Tekki is often explained as being for fighting with your back to a wall, or on the raised ground between paddy fields. Gichin Funakoshi practised Naihanchi, and only

Naihanchi, for the first nine years of his training. Are we to assume that in Okinawa practically all fights took place on the ground between paddy fields? Of course they didn't! The reason such an emphasis was placed on Naihanchi was because it was deemed to be a complete system of fighting in its own right, and hence even if that were all that was ever learnt, the karateka would be a most able fighter.

It is also important to understand that modern karate is an amalgam of many different fighting systems. That is why a large number of katas are practised by the various styles today. However, in the past, a style would revolve around a single kata. Hence, when analysing the meaning of kata movements, it should be remembered that a single kata will contain information on many differing aspects of combat. No kata is ever on a single theme. We will look at how a single kata records a complete style in more detail in Chapter 5, *The magnitude of kata*.

2. All kata applications are designed to end the confrontation instantly

A kata is a collection of a particular master's or school's finest methods. Hence, the katas will not contain any ineffective techniques. Each and every kata movement should leave the opponent in a position where they are unable to continue their assault. This may mean that the opponent is completely incapacitated (eg unconscious), or it could be that the opponent is left in a very vulnerable position (eg prone whilst you are standing). Either way, the kata never leaves the opponent in a position where they are able to fight on. Common examples of this rule being breached are kata movements being interpreted in a defensive fashion such that no attempt is made to incapacitate the opponent.

If we look at the way Shuto-uke (knife-hand 'block') is being applied in Figure 1, you'll notice that nothing has been done to prevent the opponent from continuing their assault. However, this is the most commonly taught application for this movement! We will look at some practical applications Shuto-uke in Chapter 13. For now, be aware that all kata movements should incapacitate the opponent, and should any application fail to do this, the application in question is incorrect.

*Figure 1:
Incorrect interpretation
of Shuto-uke*



3. All parts of a movement are significant

Kata contains no superfluous movements. Every single motion in kata serves a purpose. Hence, when analysing the meaning of a particular movement, it is vital that every part of that movement is considered. You should pay particular attention to how the end position was achieved, rather than just concentrate on the final part of the movement. You should also consider the use of the 'pulling hand' and the parts of the movements that are often considered as 'preparations' for the following technique. Take a look at the commonly taught application for the opening move of Pinan Shodan/Heian Nidan shown in Figure 2:

*Figure 2:
Incorrect application
for Pinan Shodan*



The left hand is commonly taught to be a 'block,' but what is the purpose of the right hand? It seems that part of the movement is serving no purpose and hence this particular application is incorrect. (We will analyse the opening sequence of Pinan Shodan/Heian Nidan in detail in Chapter 5, *The magnitude of kata*.) When a kata movement is badly interpreted so that part of the movement becomes pointless, it is fairly common to see the offending limb being classified as a 'guard'. In this instance, you have to ask why is the forehead deemed the most important part of the body to cover? Why not the groin? Or the jaw-line? It certainly doesn't look like much of a guard to me! Try to avoid clumsy explanations such as 'guards' when interpreting kata and ensure that every part of the movement is serving a purpose.

4. Every kata move is designed for use in combat

It is fairly common to see the purpose of some kata movements being explained as exercises to increase strength or improve balance. However, the purpose of every single kata movement is to disable an opponent in combat. Whilst there can be little doubt that kata is a great way to condition the body, that is not what kata was designed for. The movements in kata are designed solely for use in combat. Any other benefits are purely coincidental.

It is also fairly common to see movements attributed spiritual significance. This is particularly prevalent when discussing the opening and closing salutations. Again, it must be remembered that every single movement within the katas is for use in combat. To my mind, when a movement is attributed a physical or spiritual significance, as opposed to a combative one, it is a sure sign that the person espousing that significance has no idea what that movement is actually for! But rather than be honest and admit that they do not understand the movement's purpose, they prefer to bluff their way around it. When you consider that one of the higher goals of martial training is to transcend the ego, I find such behaviour rather sad. No one could possibly understand all the information contained within every kata anyway! Probably the shortest kata of them all is Naihanchi/Tekki, yet Hironori Otsuka (founder of Wado-ryu) said it would take more than a lifetime to master. If you

consider that even your average first dan black belt will know around seven to ten kata, how can they possibly understand each and every one of them? After all, each kata represents a complete system of fighting and the life's work of a master. We would be wise to study one or two katas in depth. And we should be humble enough to admit that we will never be able to fit the knowledge of several lifetimes into our own.

Every single movement within kata is for use in combat. We should never try to attribute other meanings simply because we do not understand how a movement is to be applied. In his 1974 book *The Heart of Karate-do*, Shigeru Egami wrote, *“Despite a lack of complete understanding, one should not assume that the movements have no meaning or function. I advise performing the movements, thinking about them, and interpreting them in your own way, concentrating heart and soul. This is practice.”* So when analysing your own kata be sure to understand that every move has a combative purpose and endeavour to understand that purpose.

5. The angles at which the techniques are performed are important

Throughout the katas we can see many movements being performed at forty-five degrees and ninety degrees. The common interpretation of these angular movements is that a new opponent is at that angle and we are turning to face them. This is simply not realistic. Most fights don't just start. They are normally preceded by some kind of verbal exchange (this will be covered in more detail in Chapter 4). Only a fool would not turn to face their attacker during this exchange. The vast majority of kata techniques are for dealing with an opponent who is directly in front of you. The reason movements are performed at angles is to instruct the kata's practitioner that the technique in question requires the karateka to move at that angle in relation to their opponent. So if a movement is performed to the side, it means that the karateka should turn sideways when executing that technique. Likewise, if a movement is performed at forty-five degrees, it means that the karateka should shift so that they are at a forty-five degree angle in relation to their opponent.

As an example, we will analyse the following sequence from Pinan/Heian Yodan.



*Figure 3:
Position arms*



*Figure 4:
Simultaneous kick
and block*



*Figure 5:
Elbow strike*



Figure 6

In the common interpretation of this movement, the fact that it is performed at a ninety-degree angle is taken to mean that an opponent is attacking from the side (**Figure 6**). Already this application is impractical. Why are the arms held where they are? They are serving no purpose. Remember that every single kata movement has a combative function and that every part of a movement is relevant. Also, why stand there with your hands in such a ridiculous position when you could turn and face the opponent? The opponent then attacks with a basic punch, which is blocked and a simultaneous kick is delivered to the chest (**Figure 7**). The opponent is then hugged as an elbow strike is delivered to their



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

chest (**Figure 8**). I'm sure you can appreciate the many reasons as to why the common interpretation of this kata sequence is not practical. We'll discuss some of these reasons in more depth later on in this chapter. For now we will concentrate on the fact that this interpretation ignores the true reason as to why the movement is performed to the side.

We shall now look at a practical application for this sequence, which takes into account the angle at which the techniques are performed. The opponent has managed to secure a grip on your clothing (**Figure 9**).

At this point the opponent's back hand is posing the greatest danger. By seizing the opponent's hand, and turning to the side, the karateka is moved off the line of any back-hand punch and the opponent's arm becomes locked (**Figure 10**). Notice how the turn to the side is a fundamental part of the movement that lessens the

chances of the karateka being hit whilst disadvantaging the opponent. The kata then tells us to pull the opponent back by their hair whilst a simultaneous kick is delivered to the knee (**Figure 11**). The opponent's head is then controlled and an elbow strike is delivered to the opponent's jaw (**Figure 12**).

This application is infinitely more practical than the preceding one. You can also see how the key to the movement is acknowledging that a movement performed sideways means that you should move sideways to your opponent. There are a number of other examples of this rule in action throughout this book.

It should now be apparent that, in order to apply such techniques, the karateka will need to practice the appropriate Tai-sabaki (body movement) and Ashi-sabaki (foot movement), because although the katas show the angle, they don't necessarily show how to get to that angle. This is one reason why it is so important to practice the kata's techniques in a realistic fashion with a partner.

Another thing to be considered is that it is generally preferable to shift to the outside of your opponent, because from that position the opponent's ability to attack you with the back hand is very limited (**Figure 13**). It is therefore common sense that most of the angular techniques in the kata will be to the opponent's outside (as is the example from Pinan/Heian Yodan). The exception will be when the opponent is attacking in a circular fashion. By attempting to move to the outside on this occasion we would be moving directly into the path of the



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14

attack. It therefore makes more sense to shift to the inside so that we are off the attack line (**Figure 14**). So when analysing your katas, you'd expect most of the techniques that are performed at angles to be to your opponent's outside. If, however, you're to the inside of the opponent, then it is very likely that the movement is performed in response to a circular attack.

Before we move on, be sure that you understand that the angles at which the techniques are performed are of utmost importance.

6. The stances are a vital component of the techniques

The stances are a vital part of any kata movement and should never be overlooked when analysing kata. If a movement is performed from front stance, then this means that the technique in question requires the body weight to be forward. Likewise, if a movement is performed from horse stance, then it means that the technique requires the body weight to be dropped straight down. And so on. The actual physical position of the legs can also be used to harm and control the opponent. We will look at the combative function of stances in detail in Chapter 14. For now, just be aware that the stances are a key part of any movement and must be considered if the techniques of the kata are to be expressed effectively.

7. Real fights are sloppy affairs and the way the application is performed will reflect this

When performing a kata, we are practising the 'ideal' movement. Which is relatively easy to achieve against thin air, but another matter entirely against another human being who is intent on doing you harm. Real fights are incredibly scrappy and frantic affairs. You should not expect an applied movement to remain exactly the same as it appears in the kata. In terms of the principles and concepts being applied, they will be identical, but in appearance they will be different. A technique's appearance should never be considered. The only valid measure of a technique is whether or not it disabled the

opponent. When applying kata techniques, do not be concerned if the movement no longer looks exactly the same as it does within the kata, because if it does, I would say that you are not practising realistically enough! The very fact that you are now performing the movement with an opponent will result in some outward changes. The more realistic the practice, the messier the movements will become. There is simply no way a kata movement will be neat and tidy when it is applied.

However, the fact that an applied movement will be rough round the edges should never be used as an excuse for poor kata. You should always strive to make your kata as near to perfection as possible. If you can't perform the movements to a decent standard in ideal conditions, you stand little chance of being able to perform the movement at all in actual combat!

Don't be concerned if the way you apply a kata movement results in a loss of form. So long as in essence the movement remains the same, this loss of form is a good indicator that you are applying the kata realistically.

8. There is a need for skills at every range

In a real situation there will no rule book or referee to state what techniques can and can't be used. The fight may involve kicks, punches, grappling, ground work, weapons, etc. When you consider that kata is a record of all the skills needed to survive a civilian altercation, it stands to reason that the kata must cover all possible ranges of civilian combat. Today's karate is predominately practised as a long-range striking system and it is a rarity for karate training to include close-range striking, grappling, ground-work, etc. However, all these aspects are recorded within the katas. Karate was originally a broad system that covered many differing aspects of combat. It is only in relatively recent times – predominately due to the restrictions of karate competition – that the art of karate has narrowed its focus.

One problem you may experience when analysing your kata is that you can only see what you know. For example, if you have no knowledge of grappling, you will be unable to see the grappling techniques in your kata. Here we have a kind of 'catch 22' situation where we need to know about a particular aspect of combat in order to learn about that same aspect. The way around this is to ensure that your martial study is as broad

as possible. Endeavour to learn about grappling, ground fighting, close-range strikes, etc, so that you will begin to recognise such techniques in your kata. Once you understand a few of the katas' methods, you'll begin to understand the nature of the method so that you'll begin to recognise other techniques, and so on. Later in this book we will be discussing the nature of many of the less commonly practised aspects of karate. It is hoped that this knowledge will also aid you in recognising these methods when they appear in the katas.

Before we move on to the next rule, remember that in real fighting there is a need for skills at every range. Also remember that karate, as recorded within the katas, is a very broad-based system and hence the katas will include a wide array of combative methods for use at every range.

9. The likelihood of any attack must be considered

It must be understood that karate is a civil tradition. The fighting methods recorded within the katas are for use against violent and untrained attackers in a civilian environment. It should therefore be obvious that the katas will not contain techniques for dealing with the skilled attacks of other martial artists. In particular, the katas will not contain techniques specifically designed to deal with other karateka.

It is very common to see kata movements explained as defences against karate lunge punches etc. What are the chances of you been attacked in such a way in a real situation? We should conclude that the chances are so very small it would not be necessary for the kata to include methods to deal with them! Certainly it would not be the case that every single move within the kata is for such attacks, as is the common interpretation.

Kata techniques are about protecting ourselves from wild swings, football-style kicks, head butts, bites, etc. Kata is not about countering the stylised attacks of other martial artists. Whilst many an insecure martial artist may wish to argue about which style would beat another style, such discussions are pointless. By concentrating on fighting other martial artists we may very well make ourselves less able to defeat an untrained assailant! Just because an attacker is not formally trained does not mean they are not dangerous.

In a self-defence situation, we should keep our techniques as simple as possible. However, should we be competing against another martial artist, it is less likely that such simple techniques would be effective because the martial artist would be aware of the methodology being applied and hence would be able to counter. This will result in more elaborate techniques being required in order to 'outsmart' the martial artist. We would need to start to employ feints, counters and attempts to provoke the incorrect trained response. This effect can clearly be seen in the evolution of sporting martial arts, where the techniques employed become more skilful and more elaborate with the passing of each year. The reason for this is techniques that scored points last year will be easily countered this year. The danger comes when we try to apply the techniques for fighting other martial artists in a self-defence situation, where the assailant is highly unlikely to be another martial artist. The use of the more elaborate techniques is now not only unnecessary, but it can also be extremely dangerous. Instead of using simple methods to ensure your safety as quickly as possible, you will invariably use overly complex techniques and waste valuable seconds employing feints etc in a vain attempt to provoke certain responses. It is for this reason that the kata keeps everything as simple and direct as possible. There is unlikely to be a need for complex methods in a real situation, so keep everything simple and direct.

Choki Motobu once said, "*The techniques of the kata were never developed to be used against a professional fighter in an arena or on a battlefield. They were, however, most effective against someone who has no idea of the strategy being used to counter their aggressive behaviour.*" So when analysing your kata remember that you should keep everything as simple as possible and that you are fighting an untrained attacker.

Another thing to be considered is the most likely range of attack. In competitive martial arts, the combatants tend to begin the fight from outside the longest range allowed, for example karateka start from outside kicking range, boxers from outside punching range etc. However, in real situations, most fights begin at 'conversation range'. The vast majority of fights are preceded by some kind of verbal exchange and it is extremely likely that the fight will begin from this distance (which is

around two feet apart or less). It therefore stands to reason that the vast majority of kata techniques will be for use at this range. Again, this is generally not how the katas are interpreted today. Take another look at the commonly taught applications shown in Figures 1, 2, 6, 7 and 8. Notice how that the distance is so great that on every occasion there is no way the attack will even make contact! This error in interpretation is mainly due to individuals trying to apply the techniques of the kata at the range associated with modern competition. When analysing your katas be sure that you are doing so at a realistic range.

10. Strikes should be delivered to anatomical weak points

All of the strikes in kata are aimed at weak points of the body. When interpreting your kata it is important that you have a clear idea of which vulnerable area the strike is being directed to. Should you come across an application where the strike is not directed towards a weak area, it is a good indication that the application in question is incorrect.

Another common error is striking parts of the body with an inappropriate surface. For example, the solar plexus (Suigetsu) is a weak area of the human body, but the striking of the solar plexus with straightened fingers is unlikely to harm the opponent and very likely to break your fingers!



*Figure 15:
Incorrect application of
spear-hand strike from
Kushanku*



The application shown in Figure 15 is the one that is most commonly taught for the spear-hand strikes throughout all the various katas. If you consider that all of the katas' strikes should be directed at appropriate weak points, it becomes apparent that the spear-hand must be aimed elsewhere. The next step is to determine what points are vulnerable to spear-hand attacks and how the kata has positioned the opponent such that the weak area in question is now opposite the karateka's solar plexus. We will discuss the location and effects of the weak points most commonly utilised by the kata in Chapter 7, *Jintai Kyusho*. For now, it is enough to remember that all of the strikes in kata are delivered to the weak points of the body.

11. No kata techniques rely upon unpredictable actions from the opponent; however predictable responses should be acknowledged

No worthwhile kata application should rely upon the opponent acting in a predetermined fashion, for example "*The opponent now counters with a back-fist followed by a basic punch*". It is fairly common to see kata applications where person A (who is acting out the kata) will perform a number of kata movements, then person B (who is on the receiving end) will respond in a set way. Person A will then counter B's attack using more movements from the kata, before A executes the finishing blow and stands there victorious. But let's say that person B responds in another way (any other way!). This would make that sequence of the kata meaningless! The movements of the kata should never rely upon the opponent acting in a predetermined fashion because the movements of a real opponent will never be predetermined.

We should always aim to fight in a way that ensures we dominate the opponent. We should never wait for the opponent to perform certain actions so that we can counter. Such a negative combative attitude is sure to lead to defeat. A good kata application will never demand anything from the opponent. It should be noted, however, that there is a difference between an opponent's voluntary and involuntary actions. The opponent's voluntary actions are in the total control of the opponent and hence the kata does not consider them. If it did, the kata would effectively be placing the

opponent in control of the fight. The opponent's involuntary actions are outside of their control and hence they are often considered by the kata. As an example, certain arm-locks will cause the opponent to involuntarily bend their knees and waist in an attempt to protect the joints of the arm from further damage. This will result in the opponent's head coming down. The following technique in the kata will be directed opposite the performer's chest such that it is at the head height of the opponent. This involuntary action is a predictable response and as such it is recognised by the kata. After all, it would make little sense to strike high if you know that there is a good chance that the opponent's head will now be low. The subject of predictable response is covered in greater detail in Chapter 6, *Atemi*. The key things to understand are that the katas never rely upon the actions of the opponent in order to be valid and effective. However, the opponent's involuntary responses to certain stimuli are considered by the kata.

12. There are many effective applications for every movement

When starting to analyse the applications of kata it is fairly common for people to ask, "*What is the meaning of this movement?*" However, there is no such thing as **the** meaning. Each and every kata movement can be expressed in many different ways, and so a better question to ask would be, "*What are the possible applications for this movement?*" This is an extremely important concept to grasp.

If you believe that each movement only has one effective application then you are effectively shutting yourself off from the majority of what kata has to offer. To fully understand a movement, and the combative principles it represents, it is vital that it is analysed from all perspectives. It could well be that a movement will have a striking application, a grappling application, a joint-locking application, etc. If you only look at one aspect of the movement you will fail to fully understand it.

It is also important to guard against your ego when analysing kata. If someone else interprets the kata differently to you, that in no way diminishes the effectiveness of your particular application. Yasutsune Itsou wrote, "*There are many movements in karate. When you train you must try to understand the aim*

of the movement and its application. You have to take into account all possible meanings and applications of the move. Each move can have many applications." Of all the karate masters, Itsou probably had the biggest influence on the way in which kata developed. Here we have him clearly explaining that each movement has multiple applications and advising us to ensure that we take all possible applications into account.

In Chapter 13 we will look at the applications of the movements commonly thought of as 'blocks'. As you'll see, each one of them has multiple applications, all of which are equally valid. Do not place limitations on your understanding of kata and do not believe that you fully understand a movement, and the concepts it represents, once you have discovered a single application for it.

13. Endeavour to understand the principles upon which the techniques rest

Try to understand 'why' the techniques work. You should go beyond the simple memorising of individual techniques and endeavour to fully understand the principles of combat upon which the katas are based. Principles are far more important than techniques. Principles can be applied in an infinite number of ways, but techniques are very specific and hence limited. You should aim to be an adaptable and versatile fighter. Endeavour to fully understand the principles and learn how to freely express them in combat. Simply knowing what various movements are for will do little to enhance your combative skills. If you only understand the surface meaning of kata movements, without understanding the principles upon which they are based, you will only be able to apply those movements if the exact situation required occurs during the fight. This effectively puts the opponent in charge because you are reliant upon them providing a situation in which you can apply your techniques! If, however, you understand the principles involved you will be able to freely express the katas concepts regardless of the situation.

Whilst initially this understanding of a kata's principles will be on an intellectual level, you should aim to integrate those principles into your subconscious (this being the main purpose of kata practice). At this high level, the body will instinctively

act in accordance with these concepts and hence make the karateka extremely formidable. Hironori Otsuka (founder of Wado-ryu) in his book *Wado-Ryu Karate* wrote, “*It is obvious that these kata must be trained and practised sufficiently, but one must not be ‘stuck’ in them. One must withdraw from the kata to produce forms with no limits or else it becomes useless. It is important to alter the form of the trained kata without hesitation to produce countless other forms of training.*” Here we have Otsuka encouraging us not to be ‘stuck’ in our katas and also to ensure that we practice our katas and their applications in a way that is not limited. It is vital to adopt this approach if you are to be able to effectively express the katas in combat. By concentrating on the principles, and the various ways in which they can be applied, the kata becomes an inexhaustible supply of martial knowledge. It is then possible to appreciate why the masters of old said it would take more than one lifetime to fully understand a single kata. We will discuss this concept in greater depth in Chapter 5, *The magnitude of kata*.

14. All applications must be workable in real situations

The fact that all applications must be workable in combat would seem to be so obvious that you could question the need to include a reminder here. However, what is less obvious to people is what actually makes a technique workable! It is vital that you fully understand the nature of real fights if you are to interpret the kata correctly. The vast majority of the commonly taught bunkai is simply not practical. Even much of what is taught as the ‘real’ applications is far too elaborate to be of actual use in the frenzy of a live fight. It is not enough that an application fits the kata, nor is it enough that it caused pain to a practice partner who stood there and allowed the technique to be applied. It must be applicable in the rough and tumble of real combat.

When looking at applications, ask yourself the following questions: Could this technique be applied when under extreme stress? Is it simple to use or is it too complex? Will it work against an uncooperative, possibly physically stronger attacker? Is the technique for use against violent untrained attacks or predetermined karate techniques?

We will discuss the nature of real fights in greater detail in the following chapter. It is hoped that the information in Chapter 4 will help you to avoid interpreting the kata in an unrealistic way. To my mind, having no application is better than an ineffective application. To interpret the katas in an ineffective way is to do them a great disservice. Also, an unrealistic interpretation may well place you in an unfavourable position should such an application be attempted in real combat. To truly ensure an application is practical it is vital to practice its use in as close a way to actual combat as safety will allow. We will discuss such training methods in Chapter 15, *Kata-based sparring*.

In this chapter we have looked at the rules of bunkai. It is important that these rules are considered when exploring the meanings of kata movements. As we progress through this book we will look at some of these rules in greater detail. For now, be sure that you understand each of the rules and how they apply to the applications of the katas.

Chapter 4

The nature of real fighting

Before we go on to look at the information that the katas contain, it is important to understand exactly what that information is for. Karate is a civil tradition and therefore the fighting methods recorded within the katas are for use within a civilian environment. The applications of the karate katas are for use against the violent and untrained, they are not for use against a skilled warrior on a battlefield or a participant in a sporting competition.

There is very little difference between a civilian fight in feudal Okinawa and a civilian fight today. Two civilians brawling in an Okinawan street would employ similar methods to two civilians fighting in a modern city. In order to understand and apply the methods contained within the katas, it is necessary to understand the nature of civilian combat.

How fights start

What we will be looking at in this section is what happens at the start of fights, not so much what caused the fight to begin in the first place. Why fights start is beyond the scope of this text. However I feel this aspect deserves a brief mention, as it is very important when discussing self-defence. I would encourage you to research why fights begin in great detail, because it is with that knowledge that fights can be effectively avoided (Geoff Thompson's *The Art of Fighting Without Fighting* is well worth a look). Try to avoid placing yourself in locations or situations where violence is likely. Be sure not to make yourself an attractive target to any would-be attackers.

Keep all valuables out of sight. Travel with the car doors locked. Park your car in well-lit areas. Avoid suspicious looking people and situations. Keep away from aggressive individuals and isolated places. Do not stop to talk to strangers etc. Be aware of your surroundings. If an undesirable situation starts to develop, you may be able to avoid it all together, and if you can't, then at least the element of surprise is lost to your assailant.

Gichin Funakoshi (Karate-Do Kyohan) wrote, *“The secret principle of martial arts is not vanquishing the attacker but resolving to avoid an encounter before its occurrence. To become the object of an attack is an indication that there was an opening in one's guard and the important thing is to be on guard at all times.”* A fight avoided is a fight won. Good martial artists are secure enough in themselves, and humble enough, to be able to walk away from a fight. It is a sorry state of affairs when an individual's ego prevents them from avoiding violence. A true martial artist will have the wisdom to avoid placing themselves in danger, and the compassion to avoid placing their opponent in danger unless violence becomes absolutely necessary. If you have done everything possible to avoid the confrontation, you will then be unfettered by any moral concerns, as you know that harming the opponent is now the only option left available to you.

If your awareness is not what it should be, the opponent will be able to take you by surprise and hence will have a large advantage. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the katas should always be performed with Zanshin (awareness). The katas will help to develop awareness and serve to remind the kata's practitioner of its importance.

If the opportunity for an ambush is lost to the opponent they will have no option but to attempt a direct attack. Directly approaching an individual takes a greater degree of courage on the part of the assailant. This is because the potential risk – either in terms of physical injury or the fact that others may be alerted to their activities – is now increased. This may cause the assailant to abort their attack in favour of finding an easier victim later on. An assailant who approaches you directly may appear to be very friendly at first in an attempt to take you by surprise. They may ask you for directions, or for a light, in a

very friendly manner in the hope that you will drop your defences and allow them to get closer. When close enough they will then launch their assault.

It is very common for an assailant to begin their attack with a barrage of swearing and verbal abuse. The assailant may wish to frighten you in order to get you to comply with their requests (give them your money etc). Alternatively, they may simply be after a fight, in which case the verbal attack is being used in order to soften you up. It may be that your would-be assailant is not overly sure of their ability to beat you and therefore the verbal exchange is an 'interview' of sorts that will help them to determine the risk of engaging in a fight. Either way, the important thing to note is that there is very likely to be some kind of verbal exchange before a fight begins.

It does not take a psychic to see when an attack is about to commence. Your assailant is likely to give a number of signals when their verbal aggression is about to escalate to the physical. Look for a change in skin colour, rapid breathing, an aggressive facial expression or stare, a clenching or shaking of the fists, pointing or pushing, a change in voice tone or pattern, excessive swearing, insults or challenges.

Many of the techniques within the katas incapacitate the opponent at this early stage. Although the attack has not yet escalated to the physical, it makes little sense to wait until it does. We will look at the pre-emptive attacks contained within the katas in more detail in Chapter 8. For now, it is sufficient to understand that many fights will begin with the protagonists involved in a verbal exchange as one, or both, attempt to close the distance.

The winner will normally be the first to act

Action is always faster than reaction. In a real fight you must never allow the opponent to gain the advantage. You must be the one who takes control of the situation and you should not simply try to counter to your opponent's actions. If you allow the opponent to land the first punch they will most likely be the winner. Whilst in karate much store is placed in 'Karate ni sente nashi' or 'there is no first attack in karate,' I feel this statement needs closer examination. Most people interpret this statement as an instruction to let the opponent launch the first

attack – which is a suicidal strategy in a live fight – but it is my belief that ‘Karate ni sente nashi’ is a much more profound message which does not require the karateka to act in such a suicidal fashion. We shall return to the concept of pre-emptive striking in Chapter 8.

Most fights begin close up

Modern day sparring matches tend to be conducted with the combatants outside kicking distance. From there, one or both of them will close the distance, execute a few techniques and then move back out again. This exaggerated distance is also often employed during pre-arranged sparring. Real fights typically begin at punching/conversation range and rarely, if ever, have the back and forth motion seen during a boxing match or a karate tournament. A few punches will be thrown, and if none should stop the fight, it will quickly collapse into grappling range.

Once the combatants have latched onto one another, moving back to punching range will not be possible due to the opponent’s grip keeping them in close. The techniques of the kata are for use within real fights and hence the majority of kata applications are for dealing with an opponent who is close up. It is also important to understand that because most fights involve some form of grappling, so do the applications of the kata.

The opponent is very unlikely to use ‘martial arts’ techniques

In a real fight, it is highly unlikely that the opponent will use techniques such as Oi-Zuki or Mawashigeri. Karate is a civil tradition and consequently the katas contain very few techniques for dealing with the skilled combinations of a trained fighter. Kata is all about defeating an attacker in a real civilian encounter. Kata is not about winning trophies in the rule bound arena or about defeating a warrior on a battlefield. As martial artists we spend a great deal of time practising with, and against, practitioners of the same discipline. As a result, boxers get good at fighting boxers, judoka get good at fighting other judoka and karateka get good at fighting other karateka. The techniques within kata are designed for use against the

violent and untrained, not other martial artists. Kata techniques most often deal with wild swings, grabs, tackles, etc. Any kata application that is interpreted as a defence against a lunging punch or other such karate technique is incorrect.

Real fights are sloppy affairs

Real fights are not choreographed like the fights in films. Nor are the combatants limited to a certain set of techniques as they are in sporting matches. Real fights are not visually pleasing and are extremely sloppy, fast and crude affairs. As martial artists we spend a great deal of time trying to perfect our techniques. A well-executed technique is very often visually striking to those who witness it. In a real fight, the opponent will not 'play ball' in the same way a compliant practice partner would. Hence, the technique will not be as pretty in appearance. What is a graceful movement when performed in the kata, or against a compliant practice partner, will become ugly when applied in an all out situation.

A technique that is very easy to apply on a compliant practice partner may become next to impossible on a live opponent. In particular, the accurate placement of blows becomes much more difficult. The more complex a technique, the greater the chance of it failing in a real situation. It is also important to understand that the huge adrenaline surge that you will experience in a live situation will greatly reduce your ability to perform complex tasks. The applications of the katas should be relatively simple. If a suggested kata application is overly complex, or if it is reliant upon the opponent behaving in a certain way, it is extremely unlikely to work.

Most fights are decided by blows to the head

Once a fight has begun, it is most often decided by who lands the first solid blow to the head. The head controls all and therefore it is the prime target in order to end the fight as quickly as possible. As a result of this, one would expect the majority of strikes contained within the katas to be directed at the opponent's head – which they are!

At first glance it may appear that many punches are aimed at the opponent's chest. This is not the case, however, as most of the 'middle level' punches are preceded by techniques that will

cause an opponent to buckle at the knees or bend at the waist. These techniques will bring the opponent's head down, so that it is in line with the kata practitioner's chest. Therefore what appears to be a middle level blow is in fact aimed at the head.

There are two key things to take into account when striking the head. Firstly, the head is very mobile and so can be difficult to strike in a live fight. Secondly, the bones of the skull are much denser than the bones of the hand, and hence punching the skull with a clenched fist may well result in a broken hand. The katas consistently deal with both of these points such that effective blows to the head can be delivered.

At close range, the head is often secured prior to the delivery of a blow. This is achieved either through the application of a lock, the direct control of the head itself, or the opponent being seized in a way that limits their motion.

With regards to the point that a blow to the head could result in damaged hands, the following points must be considered. Firstly, hand conditioning was regarded as a vital part of the original karate. Secondly, many of the strikes that are now punches were originally palm-heels etc, but were modified as the result of Itsou's changes. Finally, if when defending yourself in a real situation, all you suffer are damaged hands, then you have done very well indeed!

High and middle level kicks are unlikely to be effective

In the unlikely event that you get the room to kick, attempting a high kick is almost certain to end in disaster. As soon as you take a foot off the floor you are unable to move and are easy to unbalance. The higher you lift your foot the more vulnerable you are. In a real fight your aim is to win, not to look good! In real fights, all kicking techniques should be kept low, ideally lower than the level of the finger tips when the arms are down by the side. Low kicks are harder to block, they do not have as far to travel, and the chances of the kicking leg being caught are greatly reduced. The practice of kicking low is one that is encouraged by the katas. Many of today's karateka kick high during the performance of their kata, presumably for visual effect. However, it is vital to remember that originally all the kicks were low.

Most fights are over in seconds

Although there are exceptions, the majority of fights are over almost as soon as they have begun. It is a rarity for live fights to last more than a minute at the outside. More often than not, the winner of the confrontation will be decided in the first few seconds. One of the combatants will be rendered semi-conscious by a solid blow to the head and from that point on they will be at the mercy of their opponent. This is an important fact when attempting to understand kata.

If most fights only last a few seconds, how many techniques do you need to know? Knowing thousands upon thousands of techniques is not only unnecessary but it can be downright harmful. For a technique to be useful in a live fight the practitioner needs to be able to apply that technique with little or no conscious thought. If the practitioner has to choose from the thousands of differing techniques available to them, they will stall whilst the brain makes this decision (during which time the situation will no doubt have changed) and hence their opponent will be given the advantage.

The katas provide instruction on a key number of techniques and concepts. They do not try to provide a technique for every conceivable situation, as to do so will prevent those who practice them from responding quickly and appropriately in a live fight. Each and every kata is designed to be a stand-alone system that will instruct those who practice it in the key concepts and strategies of the system's founder. This point is discussed further in later chapters.

Do not attempt to learn an infinite number of techniques. Instead, try to understand the principles upon which the techniques of karate rest. It is far better to know very little, very well, than it is to know a great deal superficially. It is this approach that will lead to success, and hence this is the approach adopted by the katas.

Blocking and countering is unlikely to work

As mentioned previously, action is always faster than reaction. Blocking works fairly well at long range when the opponent is limited to a finite number of techniques (as in a karate tournament). Blocking also works well when you know exactly what technique the opponent is going to use. Neither of these

situations is likely in a live fight. In reality, it is very difficult to block and counter an opponent's punches at close range.

The idea of blocking and countering is one that many modern martial artists are reluctant to give up. If you have any doubts, I'd suggest that you get a partner, put on a pair of 16oz boxing gloves and go for it! Have a go at blocking and countering and I guarantee you will get trounced. From this we can conclude that the katas are unlikely to contain much blocking. This may be surprising, as many modern interpretations of the katas would have every other move as a block. However, it is important to remember that at the start of the 1900s, Itsou began teaching the katas as mainly blocking and punching as a way to conceal the dangerous techniques they contained. Prior to this time, the large karate classes – with which we are so familiar today – would not have existed. As the number of students grew, so did the need for a common terminology. The terminology adopted was the one used by Itsou at that time. Hence, many of the techniques that are currently labelled as blocks were never actually intended to be used as such. That is not to say there are no defensive techniques within the katas, as there are. However, the katas do not contain what is commonly thought of as 'blocks'. All the defensive techniques within the katas are designed such that the initiative is gained and the opponent is placed at a disadvantage. Blocks merely attempt to stop an opponent's attack and do nothing to secure a position of advantage. The correct applications of many of the techniques commonly labelled as 'blocks' will be discussed in Chapter 13.

Real fights are not like sporting contests

In a real fight there is no limit on the techniques that can be used and there will be no referee to ensure fair play. Real fights are violent and thoroughly repugnant affairs. Your opponent can bite, gouge your eyes, seize the testicles, spit, use weapons etc. Losing a real fight can result in permanent physical or mental damage, or even the loss of your life.

In combat you have to be prepared to use violent and repugnant methods when it becomes absolutely necessary. Many of the methods in the katas are as brutal as they are effective. It must be remembered that the techniques and

concepts recorded within the katas are for use in the extreme danger resulting from an unprovoked attack. Real fighting is not pretty, and neither are the methods recorded in the katas.

It is also important to understand that an opponent in the street will not respond in the same way as an opponent in a sporting contest. In a civilian self-defence situation, the assailant is very unlikely to be a martial artist and as a result they will not use complementary techniques, nor will they respond to feints or counter in expected ways etc. The techniques of the kata are all about defending ourselves in real situations. When studying bunkai, any mention of feints, skilled counters, etc is a good indication that the particular application in question is incorrect.

It is important you understand the nature of live fights if you are to successfully understand your katas. Be sure that you have fully digested the information contained in this chapter before moving on. Most karateka do not engage in realistic training and therefore do not see the errors in their interpretation of the katas. The founders of our art were all experienced fighting men who had used and relied upon their skills in real situations. The majority of people in today's society do not have to face violence on a daily basis. If these people fail to study the art of karate to the required depth, and fail to understand the advice and methodology of the past masters, they start to make assumptions about the nature of violence. They misinterpret the art so that it becomes, in its mutated form, woefully inadequate.

Some of today's martial artists fully understand violence due to the experience they have gained during the course of their employment in the fields of security and law enforcement. We need to listen to their hard won advice and use it to keep our training on the right track. One thing that always strikes me is that these modern day masters of self-protection are never at variance with the founders of karate. The masters of old understood real fighting and that is reflected in their writings and in the katas they left behind. If we practice the art in the manner that its founders intended, then karate is a very effective system.

Chapter 5

The magnitude of kata

*“**M**artial art technique is like the cosmos, it is infinite. Know that there are no such things as limits.” –*

Hironori Otsuka

Historically, an individual would formulate a kata to record their fighting methods, or the methods of their teacher. A good example of this is the kata ‘Chinto’ (or ‘Gankaku’ as it is referred to by Shotokan practitioners). Chinto was a Chinese martial artist and sailor who became shipwrecked on Okinawa. Finding himself stranded, Chinto began to steal in order to feed himself. Once the king got wind of this situation he sent Matsumura (a legendary karate master who was employed by the king as a bodyguard) to take care of Chinto. A fight ensued during which Matsumura found himself equally matched (a very rare occurrence!). Matsumura was impressed by Chinto and eventually befriended him. Matsumura fed and clothed Chinto for the remainder of the time he spent on Okinawa. During that time, the two warriors exchanged much information. Upon Chinto’s departure, Matsumura formulated a kata – named after the originator of the methods it contained – to ensure Chinto’s methods were recorded and passed onto future generations. Many other katas were also developed by an individual’s students in order to record what they had been taught (eg Kushanku, Wanshu, etc).

Obviously it would not be possible to record every single technique, as the kata would become impracticably long. It would make much more sense to record techniques that expressed the key principles of the fighting system. A good

understanding of solid combat principles is infinitely preferable to simply memorising many techniques. The “*if they do that, I will use this technique*” school of fighting is always doomed to failure because it places the opponent in charge! It is not techniques that win fights but an understanding of combat principles and a strict adherence to them. All techniques are simply manifestations of these principles.

By recording the principles of combat upon which a system of fighting rests, it is possible to record a vast amount of information in a relatively short kata. Naihanchi (Tekki) is probably the shortest kata, and yet Master Itsou required Gichin Funakoshi to practice Naihanchi, and only Naihanchi, for the first nine years of his training! This would have made little sense if Naihanchi were not a complete system of fighting in its own right. Hironori Otsuka, in his book *Wado-Ryu Karate* said that Naihanchi would take more than a lifetime to master and, “*there is something deep about it.*” It is not that the techniques themselves would take a lifetime to understand, rather it is the principles and concepts demonstrated by the kata that makes it so deep.

The proposition that Naihanchi was intended to be a stand-alone fighting system is supported in the writings and teachings of Choki Motobu (1871–1944) who was one of Okinawa’s most feared fighters. In 1926, Motobu wrote, “*The Naihanchi, Passai, Chinto and Rohai styles are not left in China today and only remain in Okinawa as active martial arts.*” In the preceding quote you will notice that Motobu refers to the katas listed as “*styles*” and “*martial arts.*” This statement is further evidence that each and every kata is a complete system of fighting in its own right. Knowing this, it is possible to understand why the masters of old would know only one or two katas. It is this deep understanding of a kata’s principles and concepts that made the masters of old so formidable. Compare this with the situation today where even relatively low grades know many katas but generally don’t have the first idea of how to apply them.

The concept of principles over techniques can be a difficult one to grasp. An analogy that may help is to think of a fighting system as an oak tree. An oak tree is vast, both in its size and years lived, but everything about that tree, and everything

required to reproduce it, is found in a single acorn. A fighting system produces a kata in the same way that an oak tree produces acorns. Both the acorn and the kata are not as vast as the thing that created them, but they record them perfectly. For an acorn to become an oak tree it must be correctly planted and nurtured. For a kata to become a fighting system it must be correctly studied and practised. It is here that we find one of modern karate's biggest failings, in that the katas are rarely studied sufficiently. To return to my analogy, we have the seeds but we don't plant them!

It is vitally important to understand the principles upon which the techniques demonstrated by the katas rest. If you do not, you will be unable to utilise those techniques in anything but the most perfect of circumstances. What if the opponent is taller, closer, stronger, etc? If you understand the principles upon which the techniques are based, you will be able to adapt those techniques, in line with the principles upon which they rest, for use in many other situations. The great Choki Motobu put it very eloquently when he said, "*One must learn how to apply the principles of the kata and how to bend with the winds of adversity.*" This is a vitally important concept to grasp.

No two fights will ever be the same. To try to prepare for every conceivable combat situation is futile. Although no two fights will ever be the same, the principles that will lead to victory never vary. Recorded within the katas you will find the fighting principles of its creator. The techniques are important, but not as important as the principles of combat behind the techniques. It may help if we take a sequence from a kata and analyse the principles upon which that movement is based.

The Pinan/Heian katas are normally amongst the first katas taught, so we shall use the first sequence of the first kata. To pre-empt your comments – I know that Pinan Shodan (Heian Nidan) is often the second kata taught today, nevertheless Itsou (the creator of the Pinan Katas) intended it to be the first one of the five.

Before we go on to look at the movement in detail, it is vital to understand that, if you misinterpret the kata, you could well end up practising techniques and principles that are not what the creator of the kata intended. If the kata is interpreted correctly, the principles demonstrated will be highly effective

and should be adhered to. If the kata is misinterpreted, it is very likely that adherence to these flawed concepts will result in certain defeat! As we look at the application of this movement, we shall also look at a common misinterpretation and demonstrate why such misinterpretations can lead to disaster. In Chapter 3 we discussed the rules of bunkai and in Chapter 4 we covered the nature of real fights. Understanding the information in those chapters will ensure that you interpret the katas correctly.



*Figure 1:
First move of Pinan
Shodan*



*Figure 2:
Cross the arms*

*Figure 3:
Pull back
and punch*



There are many different applications for this sequence, some good, some not so good. The most commonly taught one is as follows:

(a) The opponent throws a right lunging punch. The defender steps out and executes a left block. The right hand is held across the head in a 'guard'. Already this application is deficient in a number of ways. Real fights are normally preceded by aggressive and threatening dialogue, for example "*What the **** are you looking at?*" or "*Give me your money!*" Only a fool would not turn to face their attacker in light of such a verbal onslaught. This interpretation of the katas demands that you stay sideways to your attacker! Kata **never** requires you to perform actions that would place you in danger. A sound combative principle is to try to control and defuse an altercation during the dialogue stage. This principle is ignored by this application and hence it is already incorrect. In addition, the attacker's punch is well short of the target and would have been even more so if the defender had remained still! Real fights are close-range affairs, whereas this technique is executed from a ridiculously safe range. Why would the assailant launch a technique that had no chance of



Figure 4a

success? It must also be remembered that the purpose of kata is to enable us to defend ourselves against untrained attackers, not other martial artists in prearranged or rule-bound situations. It is extremely unlikely that an assailant would attack with a basic karate technique and therefore this application is again incorrect. Good training should revolve around realistic situations. An opponent attacking you with a lunging basic punch from six feet away is far from realistic!

Blocking punches during an all out fight is almost impossible. At the ridiculously safe range attached to this proposed application, blocking can work. In an all out fight, which is of course unscripted, the idea of blocking in this fashion is not sound.

The right hand also appears to serve no purpose and is often given the status of a 'guard'. In a live fight the limbs will be constantly occupied. The concept of maintaining a guard is not sound. The back and forth motion of a boxing match or karate tournament is rarely seen in a live fight. The combatants will not carefully circle one another, whilst maintaining a tight guard and defensive stance, before launching a few techniques and then promptly returning to a defensive position. Remember that kata techniques were not designed for use in the sporting environment and hence no guards are present. Another major error is that the movement is entirely defensive and makes no attempt to seize the initiative.

(b) Opponent remains static and delivers a basic reverse punch. The defender completes the second move of the kata, trapping and 'breaking' the attacker's arm.

Similar problems as exhibited by the previous movement also exist on this technique. Again, the method of attack is unrealistic and the distance is again exaggerated. This interpretation would also have us believe that reaction is faster than action (another breach of a fundamental combat principle). There is no way that the arm could



Figure 5b

be caught in this fashion in a live situation. It only works here due to the unrealistic range and type of attack, and because the defender knows what the attack is going to be!

There is no way on earth that this technique will break the attacker's arm. The reason this myth gets perpetrated is that unscrupulous instructors can always use the get out clause of "*I could break the arm if I applied the technique with full force, but obviously I don't wish to hurt you.*" This technique simply will not work. The arm is easily strong enough to resist this type of attack. Once more a principle of combat is broken as the body's strengths are attacked as opposed to its weaknesses.

A major error with this application is its insistence on the attacker performing the punch. What if the attacker had kicked, swept or grabbed? When interpreted in this way, the kata move would have been useless if the attacker had done anything other than a right reverse punch.

(c) After 'breaking' the opponent's arm, a punch is then delivered to the opponent's face.

A continuing fault with this application is the fact that the delivery of a strong punch from this distance will be impossible. The main error is that the right hand appears to serve no purpose. If the hand is not doing anything then why is it brought to the hip? It is clearly apparent that this interpretation of the kata – popular though it is – is incorrect. Many principles of combat are ignored, the rules of bunkai are ignored, and there isn't even the slightest hint of realism.

To fully understand the depth of what kata has to teach it is vital that the kata is correctly interpreted. The application we have just looked at is probably the one most commonly taught throughout the world today. Yet it is plainly unrealistic and is based upon ideas and concepts that will put the student at a huge disadvantage in a live fight.



Figure 6c

We shall now go on to look at a much more practical application that, when dissected and fully understood, will introduce the kata's practitioner to some solid combative principles. I will stress again that, important though the techniques are, they are nowhere near as important as the principles that they demonstrate.

I believe that this sequence does contain an arm-destruction technique. Just not the so-called 'arm-destruction' method commonly taught. A more practical application is as follows:



Figure 7a

(a) The opponent initiates a wild swing. The karateka moves inside the effective range of the attempted hook. The right arm is thrown upwards – in an instinctive fashion – to check the punch. The left arm is placed behind the opponent's arm in preparation for the next technique.

The combatants were initially facing one another, which already makes the technique infinitely more practical than the previous one. The technique used by the assailant is also one that is likely to be thrown in a self-defence scenario. The karateka is instructed by the kata to move inside the effective range of the punch. This attempt to close the distance will ensure the punch is ineffective and will also enable the karateka to seize the initiative. The kata also makes use of the instinctive human action to throw up the arm to protect the head.

And finally, every part of the movement serves a purpose.

As stated at the start of this chapter, the techniques are not as important as the principles upon which they rest. Before moving on to look at the second movement, it would be prudent to examine the combative principles already used.

1. Stay aware and position yourself so that the opponent is to the front and hence the element of surprise is lost.
2. Seize the initiative and take control. Do not let the opponent dominate.
3. Do not remain on the attack line, or within a technique's effective range.
4. Utilise the body's instinctive responses as far as possible.

Each and every one of these principles can be utilised in an infinite number of ways. Adhere to these principles during combat and your chances of winning will be vastly improved.

(b) The arms move in and down, as per the kata. This will lock the opponent's arm and place huge amounts of stress on their shoulder joint. The opponent will instinctively lean into the lock in an attempt to alleviate the pain and hence will easily be unbalanced.

On the second part of this technique, we can see the clear use of the principle of leverage. The left arm positions itself at the opponent's elbow joint so that it may be used as an effective fulcrum. The concept of ensuring an effective fulcrum, through which leverage can be applied, is a vital concept to utilise when applying all locking techniques. The right arm is moved downwards in order to ensure the effective use of strength. The opponent's arm is bent past the shoulder and is in a very bad position mechanically. The karateka's arm moves downward in a natural fashion that utilises the major muscles of the back. The kata also shows the limited motion of the human shoulder. Knowledge of these weaknesses will enable you to exploit them in many other ways.



Figure 8b

*Figure 9:
Figure-four arm lock
utilising the principles
demonstrated in the
second movement of
Pinan Shodan*



One of the fundamental purposes of kata is to map out the weaknesses of the human anatomy and show how these weaknesses can be exploited. The second movement of this sequence introduces the kata's practitioner to further combative principles:

5. Ensure the effective use of the principles of leverage when applying locks. The locks will then be very effective and will require less strength to apply.
6. Apply your physical strengths against your opponent's weaknesses.
7. Learn the limits of the joints of the human body. During combat attempt to take the joints beyond or against their limits.



Figure 10c

(c) Applying the previous lock can prove difficult at times, and this is acknowledged by the kata. Should the technique not be there, seize the opponent's arm and pull them off balance. At the same time deliver a punch to the opponent's jaw line. A solid blow to the jaw line will shake the brain and may well result in the opponent being rendered unconscious. The pull on the opponent's arm will limit their movement and make the accurate placement of the punch much easier. The pull will also result in the opponent's other arm being thrown backwards. This instinctive response from the opponent will momentarily prevent them from delivering any effective punches. A few more vitally important principles are expressed:

8. Be adaptable. If a technique is not there, don't go chasing it. Quickly move on to something else. The important thing is to win, not to apply a specific technique.
9. Maintain the advantage.
10. Keep the opponent off balance. An unsteady opponent is much easier to defeat. If they are struggling to stay on their feet then any technique they attempt will be ineffective. Conversely, your techniques will be much easier to apply because the opponent will not be able to effectively resist them.

11. Limit the movement of the opponent's body so that the accuracy of blows will be enhanced.
12. Use the instinctive actions of the opponent against them.
13. Aim all blows at weak points on the opponent's anatomy.

Karate is a fighting art that is only limited by your ability to understand and interpret its principles. Pinan Shodan (Heian Nidan) contains just over twenty movements. If you only understand the techniques themselves, you will only have learnt a small amount that can only be applied in fairly specific circumstances. If, however, you understand the principles upon which the techniques rest, you will be able to apply those principles in an infinite number of situations.

Let us look again at the first three moves of Pinan Shodan. In terms of techniques, we have an arm lock and a follow-up punch should the arm lock fail. If we look at the concepts upon which these moves are based, we have thirteen separate combative principles, and that is just the first three moves! These principles can be applied in an infinite number of ways and should be studied deeply. A technique may be radically different in appearance from the arm lock used at the start of Pinan Shodan, but it may still be based upon some, or all, of the same principles that the movement records.

In the past, not only would a student be taught the techniques that the katas contained, they would also receive instruction on the principles being utilised, and the various ways in which they could be applied. This utilisation of the principles of the katas means that many applications were attributed to a single kata movement.

There are essentially four differing types of kata application (five if you include the misleading and impractical applications originally designed for children). We shall now move on to discuss the various types of application in more detail.

Categories of kata application

Bunkai

The term 'bunkai' is most commonly attributed to the direct application of the kata movements. The arm lock shown earlier in this chapter would be a bunkai for the first three movements of Pinan Shodan (Heian Nidan). As mentioned earlier, a

particular set of kata movements may have numerous applications. So long as these variations use exactly the same movements as in the kata, they would be classified as 'bunkai'. It was common practice in the karate of the past to use a single movement to achieve various results. No doubt the founder of a kata would have had a main application in mind, but if it were discovered that a movement could be utilised in other ways, then these possibilities would not be ignored. It is a grave error to insist that a kata movement has only one single application. Each kata movement has many possibilities. To limit oneself to a single bunkai for a single movement is limiting to both the individual and the art of karate.

Before we go on to discuss the other types of application, it is important to understand that bunkai is the direct utilisation of a movement when performed exactly as it appears in the kata. However, there may be many bunkai for each movement.

Henka-Waza

Henka-Waza refers to 'variation techniques'. Once a particular bunkai for a set of kata movements has been understood, the student may then move on to practice variations of that technique. The resulting effect will be fairly similar, but the methods in which that result is achieved may be varied. If you look at the technique demonstrated in Figure 11 you will note that the way the opponent's arm is locked is very similar way to the method used at the start of Pinan Shodan.



Figure 11:
Variation of Pinan
Shodan arm lock

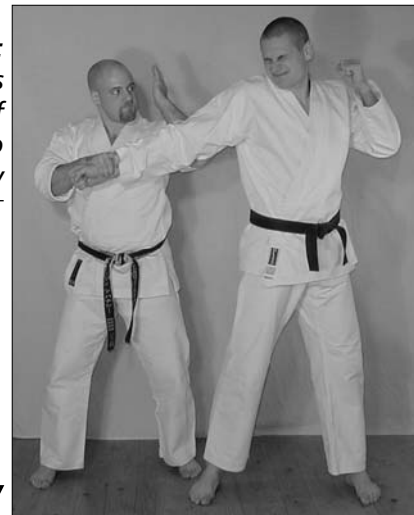


Instead of using the free arm to push the opponent's arm downward, the hand of the arm that is providing the fulcrum is hooked and pulled down. The karateka can now utilise the free hand to pull the opponent's hair (or ear) to further unbalance them. This lock could be described as a 'heka-waza' for the second movement of Pinan Shodan. The essentials of the lock have not been varied but the method of application has.

Oyo

Oyo is most commonly viewed as the application of the principles upon which a technique is based. In some instances an oyo may only have a distant relationship to the technique it originated from. However, the principles utilised will be the same. The ground-fighting arm lock shown in Figure 9 is an oyo of the opening sequence of Pinan Shodan. In other instances, an oyo may simply be the utilisation of a kata movement with the addition of techniques that are not present in the kata in question.

*Figure 12:
The opponent has
been thrown off
balance by a strike to
the rear of the elbow*





*Figure 13:
The opponent's arm
is pulled as a punch is
delivered to their jaw*



*Figure 14:
The opponent's head
is seized and an elbow
strike is delivered to
their jaw*



The movement shown in Figure 13 is performed exactly as it is on the third movement of Pinan Shodan. However, because the sequence begins and ends with differing techniques to those used in Pinan Shodan, the correct classification for the movement used in Figure 13 would be oyo as opposed to bunkai.

Okuden-Waza

Okuden-Waza refers to the secret techniques that would only be revealed to the most dedicated and trusted students. Some of the movements within the katas would have meanings that

would be deliberately concealed. The following tale may help to illustrate the level of secrecy that originally surrounded the katas and the techniques they contain. In his book *Karate-do Nyumon*, Gichin Funakoshi states that an elderly Okinawan karateka once contacted him as he wished to pass on a kata before he died. Funakoshi was unable to go and asked that the kata be taught to his son Gigo. The kata was taught in a locked room with shuttered windows. The old man told Gigo that in his lifetime he had only shown the kata to one other person, and when he did he had crucially altered it.

No doubt many hidden techniques went to the grave with the kata's formulator. However, we still have the katas and, with a little work, we should still be able to access these hidden techniques. A safe containing valuables is easily opened if you have the combination. However, if you had lost the combination you would not discard the safe! You would examine the safe and try every combination until you finally got it open. It is the same with the hidden methods of the katas.

It is also worth noting that when the katas were altered to make them more suitable for teaching to children, all the effective applications became 'Okuden-Waza'. Many of the techniques shown in this book were at one time regarded as secret, and I know for a fact that the katas contain many more secrets! It is also my belief that many of the secrets of kata will reveal themselves to the kata's practitioner after it has been sufficiently practised, studied and understood. On a few occasions I have been practising kata and the application for a particular movement just leapt into my mind. On these rare and cherished occasions, it is almost as if the kata is rewarding me for my diligence.

Once you have understood the purpose of a particular kata movement, it is important to follow it through and ensure that you study the movement, and the concepts upon which it is based, to the fullest. When the katas are studied in this way, it is easy to see why the masters of the past said it would take more than a lifetime to master a single kata. It is also now easy to understand why in the past it was regarded as infinitely preferable to study a single kata in-depth, as opposed to studying a large number of katas superficially.

It is very common for today's karate students to learn a kata, gain a basic understanding of the physical movements, and then move on to learning the next one! If karate is to be practised as an effective fighting art, it is vitally important that the katas are studied in sufficient depth. It is a great shame when an individual regards the physical performance of the kata as the be all and end all of kata practice. Being able to perform the kata well is of great importance, but it is only the start of the journey towards understanding, not the end. It is hoped that the first part of this chapter has gone some way to explaining the depth of kata. We shall now go on to discuss the many skills that the katas can teach to their practitioners.

Combative components of kata

The katas teach many differing combative techniques and concepts. In many of today's dojos, the katas are often thought of as nothing more than long combinations of kicking, blocking and striking techniques. The truth of the matter is that the katas contain a vast amount of information on numerous fighting methods. We shall now briefly discuss some of these methods. More detailed examinations of these aspects of kata will be included in the following chapters.

Jintai Kyusho

Jintai Kyusho is the traumatising of the vulnerable areas of the human body. Although the accurate placement of blows can be quite difficult during an all out fight, it should be acknowledged that a blow to a weak point would have a greater effect than a blow elsewhere.

In his book *Karate-do Kyohan*, Gichin Funakoshi lists forty weak points. The *Bubishi* – an ancient and profound text that is often referred to as the “*bible of karate*” – also contains charts and information on thirty-six points. In Chapter 7 we shall look at these points in more detail. For now, it is sufficient to understand that the katas contain a great deal of information on the weaknesses of the human body and that they show how to best exploit these weaknesses.

Tegumi

Tegumi is the term used to describe the grappling aspects of old style karate. The practice of karate's throws, takedowns, strangles chokes, holds, etc, has virtually fallen into disuse in recent times, predominately due to the influence of modern day competition. However, grappling was originally just as much a part of karate as striking. Tegumi is also a term used to describe indigenous Okinawan grappling, although the term 'Mutou' was also used in some districts. It is believed that the grappling methods developed by the Okinawans had a large influence on the fighting system that eventually became known as karate.

In Chapter 10 we will look at some of the main principles of Tegumi. Knowledge of these principles will help you to understand the grappling techniques of the katas, and is absolutely vital if you are to be able to apply those techniques in a live situation.

Kansetsu-Waza

Kansetsu-Waza refers to joint locking techniques. The Chinese martial systems – upon which much of karate is based – were traditionally made up of three sections. These sections were striking, wrestling (Shuai Jiao) and joint manipulation (Chin Na). Some karate schools employ a similar labelling system utilising Okinawan/Japanese terminology, 'Shuai Jiao' becoming 'Tegumi' and 'Chin Na' becoming 'Kansetsu-Waza'. The labelling employed is not important so long as the relevant aspects are understood. The weaknesses of each joint, and how to manipulate those weaknesses, are recorded with the kata. We shall look at this aspect of the katas in more detail in Chapter 11.

Ne-Waza

Ne-Waza refers to the application of the kata's methods whilst fighting on the ground. In real combat, many fights end up on the ground; therefore, it is necessary to know how to apply the methods of the kata during ground fighting. In modern karate, the practice of ground fighting is almost completely omitted, but it is necessary to study this aspect of the katas if effective combat skills are to be attained.

Atemi

Atemi refers to karate's techniques of impact. It is important that you do not confuse 'Jintai Kyusho' with 'Atemi'. Jintai Kyusho refers to the weaknesses of the human anatomy. Atemi is the techniques used to strike at those weak points. Without a doubt Atemi is the aspect of the katas most commonly associated with karate. As we have already discussed, karate is a multifaceted art that includes many combative methodologies in addition to striking. However, it is fair to say that the emphasis is placed predominately on striking. A well-placed strike can end a fight in a split second, but grappling an opponent into submission can take much longer. In a real situation, grappling should always be avoided if at all possible. In his book *Karate-do Kyohan*, Gichin Funakoshi wrote, "*The essence of karate is found in a single punch or kick.*" He also wrote, "*One must be very careful not to be defeated through concern with throwing an opponent or applying a joint-punishment hold.*"

When it is clear that the fight cannot be avoided, our aim is to end the fight with a single strike. That does not mean that we only strike once! It means that we resolve ourselves to take the opponent out with every single strike, whether we end up using one or twenty. It is far easier to end the fight quickly if you seize the initiative at the onset of a confrontation. As the fight progresses it tends to get scrappier and scrappier, making the accurate placement of blows increasingly more difficult. The fight must be ended as quickly as possible. Once the fight has begun, and fleeing is no longer an option, be sure to keep the pressure on and keep striking. If the opportunity to safely flee arises, then you must take it without hesitation, do not continue to strike the opponent when you could be escaping.

The katas provide a great deal of instruction on Atemi, and show us how to utilise our bodies to generate the greatest force possible. We shall look at this vitally important aspect of bunkai, and the concepts upon which it is based, in the following chapter.

Heiho

Heiho is the term used to describe the strategies associated with the application of the kata's techniques. Having an understanding of the combative techniques of the kata is only

part of the story. It is also essential that you fully understand how and when these techniques should be applied in order to ensure as quick and decisive a victory as possible. As we progress throughout this book, in addition to discussing the combative methods themselves, we will also discuss the associated strategies that ensure effectiveness in a live fight. When analysing the purpose of a kata movement, it is extremely important that the strategy employed by the kata is also considered.

Chapter 6

Atemi (Striking)

Atemi refers to strikes delivered to the body. A literal translation of the word 'atemi' would be 'body blows' which comes from the Japanese words 'ateru', meaning 'to strike', and the word 'mi', meaning 'body'.

Effective and strong striking techniques are synonymous with the art of karate. Indeed, it has been said that the essence of karate is to fell the opponent with a single blow. You may then ask why dedicate a section of this book to striking if that side of karate is so well understood? The answer is that the striking side of karate is generally poorly understood!

The striking methods practised in most of today's dojos are based upon the methods used in modern competition, and not the methods recorded within the katas. The techniques of the kata are designed to finish an opponent as quickly as possible in a real situation. The techniques of competition karate are designed to score points against another competitive karateka in a rule-bound arena. The two main differences between kata techniques and competition techniques are distance and intent. In competition the combatants are around ten feet apart, whereas in real fighting they will be around ten inches apart. In competition the intent is to win the tournament, whereas in real fighting the aim is to incapacitate the opponent with a single blow.

In this chapter we will discuss the nature of the striking methods recorded within the katas and look at how these methods should be applied in combat.

The first concept we will look at is 'one blow-one kill'. Before we go on, I feel it is important to emphasise that what we are really talking about is incapacitating the opponent with a single blow, not actually killing them! The term 'one blow-one kill' is an old one that I'd like to continue using, but it is vital to understand that our actual intention is to decisively incapacitate the opponent.

Another misunderstanding associated with 'one blow-one kill' is the idea that you only deliver one blow. If that one blow gave you the chance to escape then that is all that would be required. However, if it did not, then you would deliver as many blows as was necessary to ensure your safety. The concept is that with every single blow executed, it is your intention to end the fight there and then.

This is where karate differs from other martial arts as we rarely use strikes as a means to purposefully set up other techniques. The purpose of karate strikes is to stop the fight there and then. We will only move on to use other techniques if (for whatever reason) the preceding technique has failed to stop the opponent. Throughout the katas, no strike is delivered as a feint, or to weaken the opponent. If a blow does not end the fight, and we can't escape, then we aim to end the fight with the very next blow, and so on.

To have the potential to stop an opponent, a blow will need the following qualities:

1. Reasonable speed
2. Body weight behind the blow
3. The force generated must be transferred through a strong part of your body ...
4. ... into a weak part of the opponent's body
5. The opponent should be unprepared to receive the blow
6. You must be mentally committed to the blow.

1. Reasonable speed

A blow that is going to stop an assailant will have to make impact at a reasonable speed. The greater the energy contained within the strike, the greater the impact. In addition to increasing the level of impact, increased speed also has other advantages. A blow will only have an effect if it hits the target. A slow strike is easier to avoid. Even if the evasion is only

partial, it will still significantly reduce the effect of the blow. In kata practice, we are encouraged to constantly strive to increase the speed of our techniques, but it must be acknowledged that physical speed is only part of speed as a whole. An important part of overall speed is the time it takes to make and enact decisions. You need to be able to recognise and manufacture openings, and then deliver the appropriate strike in a split second. Even a momentary delay can mean that the opportunity is lost. It is very important that you take the techniques of the kata and practice them with a live partner if your decision making speed is to be increased. It is also essential to endlessly drill the techniques so that they become instinctive, rather than actions that require conscious effort.

2. Body weight behind the blow

As practising martial artists you will have no doubt heard the term 'punching your weight'. One of my friends used to be into body building in a big way. In an attempt to burn off some excess fat he had bought himself a punch bag. He asked me if I could take him through some bag work drills. At around sixteen and a half stone you would have expected him to be able to tear the punch bag from its mountings. As it was, he could barely make it swing. This was because all his punches (having never been previously taught how to deliver them correctly) were performed using the arm alone. In contrast, I have seen people of very slight physical stature deliver incredibly powerful blows due to the effective use of body weight.

One of the difficulties I encountered during my early years in karate, and still experience today in my role as an instructor, is the notion of 'body weight'. If you tell a student to adjust their arms, legs, hips, hands, etc, they have little trouble with this because everyone knows where those body parts are and how to move them. When asked to shift their body weight, I often get students with expressions on their faces that seem to say, "*Where the hell is my body weight?*" It takes a lot of practice to intuitively know-how to move your body in such a way as to ensure the effective transfer of your weight into a technique. Black-belts generally know how to shift their weight such that, even when shown a totally new technique, they would intuitively know how to use their weight to their advantage. A

white belt shown the same technique would have to be shown every little detail, and then practice for many hours before the weight transfer was correct.

Throughout the various katas you are required to shift your body weight forward, backward, to the sides, at angles, downward, upward, etc. If you have a good instructor, who demands attention to detail, then the katas are one of the best ways of learning about body weight. However, the proof of the pudding is always in the eating. Delivering your strikes against a punch bag, makiwara, pads, etc, will give you the feedback needed to ascertain whether you are using your weight effectively. It is very important to intuitively understand how to put body weight into your strikes if you are going to be able to deliver decisive blows and freely express the principles of kata within combat.

3. The force generated must be transferred through a strong part of your body...

Regardless of how much power is generated, it will be of little use if that power cannot be transferred efficiently into the opponent's body. It is crucial that a strong part of your anatomy is used to connect with the opponent. The katas provide instruction on how to correctly form a fist, knife-hand, palm-heel, etc. Once we have developed the correct form within the kata, we should then practice the same strikes against punch-bags etc in order to ensure we are using the correct part of the body to make impact.

The katas contain many different striking surfaces. Due to the rules within competitive karate, many of these striking surfaces are not included in regular practice. This is a great shame as many of the striking surfaces that were originally used are far more effective than the commonly taught fist. For example, a finger strike to the eyes will have a far greater effect than a jab to the face with a clenched fist. It is important to take all striking surfaces from within the kata and use them in other areas of training. Striking surfaces are very important. Strike with the wrong area and not only will the strike be ineffective, but there is also a strong chance you will injure yourself.

4. ... Into a weak part of the opponent's body

It is fairly obvious that a blow to a weak part of the human anatomy will have a far greater effect than a blow anywhere else. Jintai Kyusho – or ‘weak points of the human body’ – is an important part of karate, which is now rarely taught. In much of today's karate, knowledge of scoring areas is considered more valuable than knowledge of these weak points. Another reason for these weak points becoming neglected is because discussing the effects of various karate blows is very unpleasant! When adults are practising a combat art, I feel it is vital that they become fully aware of the realities of fighting. It is only when we stop sanitising violence that we come to realise just how repulsive it really is. It is only when this has been acknowledged that we will truly do everything in our power to avoid violence.

The katas contain vast amounts of information on the weak areas of the human body. A key with regards to how this information is recorded is the fact that the katas generally (but not always) assume that the opponent is a similar height to you. However, it is important to understand that many kata techniques force the opponent to move from the upright position, so a kata technique that looks like strike to the solar plexus – because the punch is opposite your own solar plexus – may in fact be a strike to the base of the opponent's skull. If you have a good knowledge of the weak points of the human body then by looking at the preceding kata technique you will have a good idea which point is actually under attack. Many kata techniques manipulate the opponent in order to expose weak points. Without a knowledge of these points you will not understand the exact purpose of many kata movements. We will cover the weak points of the body in Chapter 7, *Jintai Kyusho*. For now, it is enough to understand that the katas always aim their strikes at the weak points of the body. Hence, all karate strikes should also be directed at those same weak points in actual combat.

5. The opponent should be unprepared to receive the blow.

If the opponent is prepared for a blow then it will have a greatly reduced effect. It is important to understand that there

are essentially two reasons why blows will incapacitate an opponent. The first reason is that the strike has had an effect that prevents the opponent's body from functioning correctly, such that they are unconscious, unable to breathe, etc. The second reason is that the blow has destroyed the opponent's mental resolve so that their desire to fight has evaporated. A sudden and unexpected blow, which may not have the physical requirements to stop an assailant, may still end the fight due to the shock that such a blow will induce. The fact that the opponent is shocked will cause them to mentally stall and thus provide the window of opportunity for a successful escape. This is particularly true of pre-emptive striking which we shall look at in Chapter 8.

During the fight it is vitally important that the blow strikes the opponent without them being made aware that it is coming. Should the blow be telegraphed, the opponent will be mentally prepared to receive it and they may also be able to avoid the blow altogether. Throughout the katas, one key principle is that all techniques should be executed with the minimum of movement. If a movement does not add anything to the effectiveness of the technique it should be omitted. This will ensure efficiency of motion and will help to ensure that the blows are not telegraphed. The katas use numerous other strategies to ensure blows are effectively delivered, and we shall look at a few of these strategies later in this chapter.

6. You must be mentally committed to the blow

A vital part of any combative action is the mental resolve required to successfully execute that action. The katas not only provide us with the correct physical motions and combative principles, but they also provide us with the correct mental attitudes. There should be no doubt that it is the mental aspects of kata practice that are the most important. When practising kata you should ensure that your mind is totally focused on the task at hand and is not distracted by extraneous thoughts. The mental focus developed by the kata should also be applied to bunkai practice and kata-based sparring. In this way your mind will be trained to fully devote itself to the moment so that combative actions are delivered decisively and without hesitation.

If you were concerned with getting hurt whilst attempting to deliver a technique, your mind would be divided and the chances of the technique succeeding are greatly reduced. Paradoxically this misplaced desire not to get hurt will actually increase the chances of you getting hurt! There is a samurai poem that states that “*The warrior who enters battle with the intention of surviving, never will. The warrior who leaves home for battle with the intention of returning, never will.*” The poem illustrates the idea that by undermining our mental resolve and dividing our attention, we destroy our ability to act effectively in the heat of combat. In *The Book of the Five Rings*, Miyamoto Musashi wrote, “*Do not think of victory or defeat, but think only of cutting the enemy.*” Again we see the importance of fully giving ourselves to the moment being emphasised.

Another mental quality that should be developed by kata practice is the ability to know that a technique has been successful even before it has been executed. You have such confidence in your actions that the only thing needed to ensure victory is the passing of time. This is not to be confused with arrogance. What we are talking about is an unfettered mind executing a skilful technique, at the right time, so that the opponent is powerless against it. Throughout our kata and bunkai practice we should be visualising the effects of our techniques so that, having performed a movement thousands of times before, we have no doubt that it will be successful. This will prevent any destructive or divisive thoughts from entering the mind and will help the movement to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In the reality of combat, techniques do fail. However, if an individual's mind is focused and unfettered there will be no adverse mental reaction to this failure. Another technique will instantaneously follow so that the foreseen victory still takes place. The mental side of kata is vitally important and often overlooked. Throughout all your kata and bunkai practice it is vital to work on your mind-body link such that all actions are executed using your entire being.

Be sure to keep the six points in mind during all your training such that you are constantly striving to apply the concept of ‘one blow-one kill’ to all your striking techniques. Now that we have discussed the key concepts associated with karate's

striking techniques, we shall move on to discuss the striking methods themselves and how they are applied in combat.

Kicking

One thing we should say at the very onset of this section is that kicking is probably the least effective of all the combative methods available. This is because your motion and stability are severely curtailed the instant you take a foot off the floor, and you rarely get the space to use kicks anyway. That is not to say that kicking does not have a role to play, because it does, but merely to point out that this role is nowhere near as large as much of modern practice would have us believe. In the modern dojo, practically every technique has a kick within it somewhere. If you compare this with the katas you will note that kicks are nowhere near as widely used. The simple reason for this is that the techniques of the kata are designed for real combat and so the use and emphasis on kicking is based upon those strategies.

Another thing to be aware of with regards to kicking is that it is always best to kick low, ideally lower than the level of the fingertips when the arms are down by the side. Low kicks are harder to counter, they are quicker and the chances of you being unbalanced are greatly reduced. In recent times, many of the kicks within the katas have been elevated, presumably for visual effect. However, it is vital to understand that originally all the kicks throughout the katas were low. If you practice a more modern version of a kata then you may find middle-level kicks. However, when interpreting and expressing the katas all the kicks should be aimed low. Certainly there are no head height kicks within the katas, as to execute such a kick in a real situation is suicidal! There are kicks directed to the head, but in these instances the opponent has been positioned so that they are on the ground or on their knees, hence the kick is still low.

Hand strikes

Good hand techniques are the foundation of any realistic fighting system. This is because the hands are quick and accessible tools, and the most common distance at which fights begin is 'talking distance' which is ideal for the delivery of hand strikes. When discussing hand techniques, it is punching with a

clenched fist that tends to come to mind, but there are many other effective ways to strike. Throughout the various katas we can see the repeated use of palm-heels, knife-hands, hammer-fists, straight-finger strikes, etc. Today, many of the techniques that appear in the katas as clenched fists were originally open-handed strikes. When Itsou revised the katas for use in the physical education of Okinawan children, he changed many of the more dangerous strikes into the less dangerous fist. Hence, when we are practising the katas today, it is perfectly acceptable to substitute another striking tool for a fist when appropriate.

This is not to say that striking with a clenched fist is ineffective. The main advantages of striking with the fist are that the individual fingers are well protected, the fist can be used to strike almost anywhere on the body, it is relatively easy to chain rapid combinations of punches together, and the fist is both a natural and quickly formed striking tool. The disadvantages are the knuckles can be easily broken when striking a solid surface such as the skull, the fist can be ineffective when striking some vital points because of the comparatively large surface area, and blows delivered with the fist are generally not as decisive as open handed strikes. The key thing is to use the right striking tool in the right situation.

Elbows, knees and head-butts

The close-range striking techniques are often neglected. Once again this is because their use is banned in modern-day competition. And rightly so! Elbows, knees and head-butts are extremely potent and powerful techniques that have no place in sport. However, the ability to strike at close-range is a must if effective combat skills are your aim.

One thing that you must understand is that close-range combat should never actually be sought out. Once you enter close-range, the option to escape is often denied you because of the opponent's grip keeping you in close. If the opponent closes the gap (which is not at all difficult to do) then you need to know how to fight at close-range, but it should never be something you opt for. If the fight should go to close-range, you should aim to end it as quickly as possible (as you always should). The most effective way to do this is striking. Grappling

is fairly popular at present and hence there is a tendency to overlook the fact that a well placed elbow strike is a quicker and easier way to end a fight than any arm-lock or strangle. That said, you need to be in possession of adequate grappling skills in order to create the opportunity to deliver strikes.

If you look at the katas, you'll notice that grappling and striking techniques are almost always used together at close range. The integrated use of grappling and striking is the key to successes at this distance. If you look at practically every instance throughout the katas where elbows, knees or head-butts are used, you will notice that they are used in conjunction with a grappling technique in order to maximise the effect of the technique.

Another key with regards to close-range strikes is that the katas never instruct their practitioners to close the gap to utilise those techniques. They are only for use once you find yourself at close-range, they aren't used to get you to that distance!

Now that we have discussed the broad principles of the kata's striking techniques, we shall move on to look at the principles of kata associated with the effective delivery of strikes in actual combat.

Accuracy

During the chaos of a fight the accurate placement and delivery of strikes becomes extremely difficult. Whilst it is relatively easy to hit a punch-bag, strike a focus-mitt, or deliver accurate blows when practising with a compliant practice partner, it is extremely difficult to deliver a powerful and accurate strike to an opponent who doesn't want to be hit. Anyone who tells you otherwise simply hasn't had enough (or any) fighting experience. If you've engaged in realistic combat training, or have been unfortunate enough to experience a real fight, you'll know that the accurate delivery of blows is extremely difficult. The best way to ensure accuracy is to act pre-emptively in order to deliver the strike before the fight is underway. Once the fight is underway your accuracy will be improved if you can successfully control or limit the opponent's motion. We will look at pre-emptive striking in Chapter 8. For now, we'll now move on to look at how the katas control the opponent so that strikes can be successfully delivered.

Close-range control

At close range it is vital to control the opponent in such a way that prevents them from fighting effectively whilst providing openings for your own decisive strikes. If we look at the opening sequence of Naihanchi/Tekki kata we can see this principle in action.

*Figure 1:
Step across whilst
raising arms*



*Figure 2:
Pull hand to hip
whilst delivering
vertical Shuto strike*





Figure 3:
Elbow strike



Figure 4:
Position hands



Figure 5:
Gedan-barai



*Figure 6:
Punch*



*Figure 7:
Step across*



The application for this sequence is as follows. The opponent swings a right punch towards you. Turn sideways whilst moving inside the effective range of the punch. The hands will instinctively cover the side of the head as per the kata due to the panic response (**Figure 8**). Using the principle of Muchimi (see Chapter 10, *Tegumi*) the opponent's right arm is seized. The arm is then pulled as a strike is delivered to the opponent's



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11

carotid sinus (**Figure 9**). Here we can see the first example of close-range control being used to enhance the accuracy of strikes.

The pull on the opponent's arm will have four main effects: (a) the opponent will be momentarily secured as they physically and mentally regain their balance; (b) the opponent's head and body will turn such the carotid sinus will be exposed and lined up for the forthcoming strike (this is also an example of 'predictable response' which we will discuss later in this chapter); (c) the grip on the opponent's arm will aid in the tactile location of the target area; (d) the opponent's opposing shoulder will be thrown backward, which will reduce the probability and effect of any follow-up strike from the opponent. This use of the hikite (pulling-hand) to control the opponent is extremely common throughout the katas.

The opponent's head position is then controlled using the right hand as a left elbow strike is delivered to the side of their jaw (**Figure 10**). Without the controlling hand, there is a good chance the blow would miss if the opponent even did as little as flinch. With the controlling hand there, it does not matter if the opponent moves, as the hand will help to limit that motion. The controlling hand will also locate the opponent, as you will be able to 'feel' their movements. Because of the very nature of elbows it is very rare that the katas instruct us to deliver them without the controlling hand being used.

Following the elbow strike, the opponent's hair and chin are seized and pulled down to your side (**Figure 11**). This movement is in preparation for the following technique and it ensures that control



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15

over the opponent is maintained. The opponent is then pulled around by their hair (**Figure 12**). This will unbalance the opponent, it will also expose the side of their jaw, and the fact that the head is controlled will greatly increase the chances of the following strike being successful (**Figure 13**). Seizing the hair is another common way in which the katas control the opponent's position. There is a good chance that the opponent will fall to the ground after the hair pull and strike. The kata then instructs us to reposition ourselves by stepping across (**Figure 14**) so that a final strike can be delivered (**Figure 15**).

Throughout the sequence from Naihanchi/Tekki we can see the repeated use of various grips to control the opponent at

close range so that the accuracy of the blows is enhanced. These methods of control will not allow you to strike the opponent at will, because the accurate placement of blows remains difficult. That said, these methods of control make the job easier, and should the blow not be successful, you will still be in a position of advantage.

Another concept utilised by the katas to enhance accuracy is that of 'predictable response'. We mentioned this concept in passing earlier in this chapter and we will now move on to discuss it in more detail.

Predictable response

There are a number of instinctive responses that the human body will make when subjected to certain stimuli. These responses are generally physical actions taken by the body, without conscious thought, in order to protect itself from physical harm. The classic example is what happens when you inadvertently touch something hot. The hand is snatched away from the source of the heat before the brain has even had chance to consciously register that heat. A combat-related example would be the bending at the waist and the bringing together of the knees in order to protect the groin from further attack should it have been struck. Another example is the turning away of the face and the closing of the eyes should the eyes be attacked. From a grappling perspective, the body will instinctively try to move away from pressure applied to the joints in order to alleviate that pressure and hence avoid any permanent damage. The body has many such involuntary actions. Kata uses these involuntary actions to predict the opponent's most likely movement so that their position can be best determined for a follow-up strike.

Before we move on to look at some examples of this principle in action, it is very important that you have a clear understanding of the difference between 'predictable responses' and 'trained responses'. A predictable response is the utilisation of the body's own instinctive actions to control the motion of the opponent. A trained response is the action that an individual has been conditioned to take in response to certain stimuli. An example of a trained response would be a boxer raising his arms to protect his head from blows, or a

competitive karateka shifting out of the range of an anticipated kick.

As martial artists we spend a lot of our time training with and against other martial artists. During such training we will invariably try to outsmart our opponents by getting them to respond in the wrong way through the use of feints, bluffs, counters, etc. When we are fighting fellow martial artists, the use of deception to manipulate our opponent's responses can be highly effective.

However, in a real situation we are highly unlikely to find ourselves facing another martial artist! The untrained attacker (who's lack of training makes him no less dangerous) simply won't respond to feints etc, so employing such tactics in a real fight is both pointless and foolhardy. Instead of wasting time trying to provoke a response that won't materialise, you'd be better directing all your efforts towards incapacitating your opponent or fleeing.

Remember that kata is all about real fights in a civilian environment. Kata does not contain feints or any other such ploys to provoke a trained response. However, the kata does provoke the body's involuntary responses. These are common to all human beings and the opponent will have little control over them. The katas never attempt to take advantage of a trained response, but often manipulate the body's involuntary responses.

We can see a few examples of predictable responses being used in the opening sequence of *Naihanchi/Tekki* shown earlier. If we look at Figure 9, we can see how the pull on the arm has caused the opponent's head to turn so that the carotid sinus is open to attack. In the majority of cases the opponent will respond in this way when their arm is yanked in this fashion. Hence, the kata instructs us to make use of this response by attacking the areas the response makes available. The final movement of the sequence also utilises predictable response. The neck crank and punch will most likely result in the opponent landing with their head to the left-hand side of the karateka. The kata acknowledges this by including a short step to the left to ensure the karateka is correctly lined up for the stamp kick.

The concept of predictable response is widely used throughout the katas. If we look at the following example from Pinan Shodan/Heian Nidan kata we can see how the opponent's own instinctive responses can be used against them.



*Figure 16:
Bring the arm across
the body*



*Figure 17:
Perform Soto-Uke*



*Figure 18:
Front kick*



*Figure 19:
Reverse punch*



The application of this sequence is as follows. During the fight the opponent's wrist has been seized. Pressure is applied to the opponent's elbow using the forearm whilst the wrist is pulled to the hip. This pressure will cause the opponent to instinctively move away from the lock in order to protect the elbow. The opponent will involuntarily to turn to the side and bend at the waist (**Figure 20**). Predicting where the opponent's head will most likely end up, the kata then instructs us to seize the opponent's hair and pull their head back in the opposite direction



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23

(**Figure 21**). Once the pressure on the elbow is released the opponent will try to straighten their posture. This will result in the opponent moving their head in the same direction as the hair pull, hence reducing the amount of strength required. The sudden change of direction in the movement of the head can whiplash the neck. In order to reduce any pressure in the neck, the body will instinctively push the hips forward and bend the knees. The opponent will now be sideways on to the karateka with their legs bent. This provides the ideal opportunity for a kick to be delivered to the knees such that opponent's legs will buckle and their knees will hit the floor (**Figure 22**).

Remember that although kicks may be higher in the modern versions of the kata, originally they were all aimed low. The head remains controlled and the opponent is now at the right height, and facing in the correct direction, for a decisive finishing blow to be delivered to the side of the jaw (**Figure 23**). Notice that throughout the sequence the kata uses the opponent's instinctive responses against them in order to ensure that the opponent's motion is controlled, and hence the chances of an accurate blow being delivered is greatly increased.

Although predictable response is used by the katas, it is not relied upon. The katas shows us what the opponent's most likely response will be, but it can never show us what the opponent's response **will** be! Should the opponent respond in an unexpected way, then the technique in question should be immediately adapted or abandoned. Never try to force a technique if the opportunity for its successful application is not there. It is also very important that you never become locked into a fixed pattern. You must be able to freely express the kata's principles relative to the situation at any particular time. If the opponent has not responded in the expected way

then you should adapt, alter, or abandon your movement instantaneously.

The katas often show a combative sequence and then immediately follow it with “*what to do next*” should it all go wrong. If you take a look at Figures 7, 8 and 10 in Chapter 5, you can see the first two moves of Pinan Shodan/Heian Nidan show an arm lock, and the third movement shows what to do if the arm lock fails. There are many other such examples throughout the katas.

Using the opponent’s instinctive actions against them will help you to control the opponent and deliver accurate strikes. When analysing the applications of the katas it is vital that the opponent’s most likely responses are considered.

Impact development

When fighting it is vital that your striking techniques hit the opponent with sufficient force. We have already discussed the requirements for a stopping blow. We will now discuss how we can practice the techniques of the kata such that the required attributes are developed.

It is very important to practice the techniques and concepts recorded within the katas in a realistic fashion. Kata practice alone (although vital) will do little to improve your ability to apply the kata’s concepts in a real situation. If you wished to be a competent cook, you’d study the recipes in great detail. However, simply studying recipes won’t make you a cook. At some point you’ve got to get into the kitchen and give it a go! It is the same with kata. Study and practice of the kata are of vital importance; however, it is critical that the theories of the kata are put into practice.

Although the katas teach you how to develop strong striking techniques, merely performing the katas won’t bring that development about. It is important to actually practice strikes against a target because there is a huge difference between striking thin air and an object. It is for this reason that such a heavy emphasis was placed upon the use of makiwara (striking posts) in classical karate. Of course the modern punch-bag, focus-mitts etc can also be used to develop impact.

Before we move on to look at these pieces of equipment in turn, I feel a word of caution is in order. The incorrect delivery

of techniques against a striking surface can result in severe injury. Please ensure that you receive tuition from a qualified instructor before undergoing this type of training.

Makiwara

Although there are numerous types of makiwara, the main ones are the standing type (tachi-makiwara) and the hanging type (age-makiwara). The standing makiwara consists of straw bundled together with straw rope so that it is around sixteen inches in length, five inches wide and three inches thick. The rope is then flattened and softened with a mallet. The makiwara is then attached to the top of a post. This post should be seven feet long and about four and a half inches square. At least forty inches of the post should be buried in the ground. In order to ensure that the makiwara gives a little, the part of the post that protrudes from the ground should be cut diagonally so that the top of the post is around half an inch thick.

The standing makiwara is predominately used to develop hand and arm techniques. Through the repeated striking of the makiwara, the hands become conditioned, technique is improved and the karateka's ability to deliver effective strikes is vastly increased. The standing makiwara is a great training tool, but its main drawback is its lack of versatility. The target is always at the same height, hence accuracy is not developed and the practice of combinations is severely limited. I'm not saying that you should not use the standing makiwara – because as I said, it's a great piece of equipment – but it should be used in conjunction with the other items discussed in this section.

The hanging makiwara is less common than its standing counterpart, but it is a good piece of equipment that is the classical equivalent of the modern punch-bag. The hanging makiwara is made from a bundle of straw just over two feet in length, with a diameter of just over a foot. A rope is then wound along the length of the straw bundle. The makiwara is then hung at chest level with rope from either end. The hanging makiwara was predominately used to practice kicks, but it was also used in order to develop thrusting punches. The fact that the hanging makiwara moves more freely than its standing counterpart also makes it a useful tool to develop an appreciation of distancing and footwork.

Focus-mitts

The focus-mitts – sometimes also referred to as ‘hook and jab pads’ – are a great and versatile tool to aid in the development of your striking skills. When used correctly they will improve your power, accuracy, versatility and your stamina (if used for long enough). There are some that will no doubt say that the focus-mitts are not a ‘traditional’ piece of equipment and hence they have no place in the karate dojo. Whilst it is true that the formulators and developers of the katas will not have used focus-mitts in their training, I don’t agree that means we shouldn’t! Whilst it was relatively easy for the karateka of the past to get some rope, straw and a post to make a makiwara, it would be impossible for them to get the materials (high density foam, ‘Velcro’, etc) to make a pair of focus-mitts. If the masters of the past had had access to focus-mitts, I feel fairly confident that they would have embraced them as a way to enhance their striking skills.

The main advantage of the focus-mitts over other pieces of equipment is their versatility. The person wearing the mitts can position them so that practically every striking technique and combination can be practised. The fact that the individual can move around freely also means that focus-mitts are great for developing footwork and reaction speed. Personally, the focus-mitts are my favourite piece of equipment for developing my hand strikes. However, I don’t like using them to practice kicking techniques simply because it is almost impossible to hold them in place so that sufficient resistance is provided. Within competitive karate, focus-mitts are often used for kicking practice, but it should be remembered that in this instance it is the accurate placement of controlled kicks for use in the competitive environment that is being developed. However, when practising the methods of the kata against focus-mitts our goal is the development of strong impact so that our blows are effective in actual combat. The focus-mitts are a great piece of equipment that can help to develop impact, footwork and accuracy for all the hooks, palm-heels, uppercuts, etc, found throughout the katas.



*Figure 24:
Focus-mitts*



The punch-bag

The punch-bag is arguably the number one piece of equipment for the development of power. The mass of the bag means that it can be used to practice practically all of the techniques found within the katas. This includes hand strikes, punches, elbows, knees, head-butts and kicking techniques. The bag is great for developing impact, footwork, combinations and stamina. However, the punch-bag is not that useful for developing accuracy due to its size.

For the karateka, a fairly long bag is best (about five or six feet in length). A standard boxing-style bag will be too short, because although boxers never hit below the waist, a great many kata techniques do. In particular, it should be remembered that all of the kata's kicking techniques should be delivered below waist height. Hence we need a bag that is long enough to allow us to practice combinations that include both high and low strikes. The bag is a great piece of kit that is a real confidence builder. It's one thing to perform a movement within the kata, but it's something else entirely to actually hit the bag with it and feel its effects. Through bag-work you'll be able to ensure that the techniques of your kata are effective and can develop large amounts of impact when required.

*Figure 25:
The punch-bag:
every home should
have one!*



The kick-shield

As its name suggests, the kick-shield is predominately used for the development of kicking techniques. However, it is possible to use the kick-shield to develop elbows, punches, etc. One of the advantages of this piece of equipment is that the person holding the kick-shield can move around and this makes the actual placing of the kicks more realistic. Because kicks are so powerful, it is vital that the person on the receiving end holds the shield correctly. Certain techniques, such as stamping towards the knees, should not be practised on the shield as the remaining force could still damage your practice partner's joints. Another advantage that the kick-shield has over other pieces of equipment is that you get a much better appreciation as to the true effect of the blow because you can observe the effects upon the person holding the shield. If you deliver an elbow strike to the shield that knocks your partner across the room, it's a pretty safe assumption that if your partner had not been holding the shield, and if they hadn't braced themselves, then that the elbow would have proved to be a stopping blow.

You must make impact work a regular part of your training. Be sure to practice the striking techniques of the kata against impact equipment so that you develop the attributes needed to deliver stopping blows in a live situation. Before we leave

Atemi to look at other aspects of Bunkai-Jutsu, I think it would be wise to summarise what we have covered in this chapter.

Summary

1. In real fights, striking techniques should always be the first option.
2. Endeavour to understand and utilise the six requirements of the one blow-one kill concept.
3. Remember that kata techniques are for the use against an untrained assailant in a real situation. Kata techniques are not for use in the sporting environment. It is important to understand these differences if the kata is to be effectively interpreted and expressed.
4. Study the uses and limitations of the various striking tools employed throughout the katas so that in combat the right method is utilised at the right time.
5. Understand the difficulties associated with the accurate delivery of strikes and how the katas attempt to minimise these difficulties through the use of close-range control and predictable response.
6. Ensure that you practice the striking techniques of the kata against impact equipment so that power is effectively developed.

Be sure to digest the information contained within this chapter so that you understand how the katas make use of Atemi techniques. This will allow you to realistically interpret your own katas and effectively express them in combat. We will discuss some other aspects of Atemi in the chapters on Pre-emptive Striking and Jintai-Kyusho (vulnerable points).

Chapter 7

Jintai kyusho (Weak areas of the human body)

In addition to knowing how to hit, it is also important to know where to hit. Before we go on to look at the target areas, I feel it is important to revisit the concept of accuracy. Real fights are incredibly messy affairs. Try a bit of ‘anything goes’ sparring and notice how you find yourself in and out of every conceivable position. Once the fight is underway, the accurate placement of strikes is not easy. It is easy enough when the opponent is standing still for the purposes of a demonstration. However, it is much more difficult when the opponent is doing their utmost not to get hit and they are determined not to go down without a fight. A weak blow will need pin-point accuracy to be effective. A stronger blow can be less accurate but can still incapacitate the opponent. Power is more important than accuracy, simply because accuracy can be so difficult to achieve. That said, a blow to a weak point will have a far greater effect than a blow to anywhere else. It is our intention to hit the weak points, but it is not easy. Some believe that power is not that important if you have a knowledge of striking areas. Knowing where these points are and being able to hit them in the rough and tumble of a live fight are two very different things.

To give ourselves the best possible chance of actually hitting these targets we must develop accuracy through realistic partner work. Great care must be taken during these drills due to the danger of a blow going in a little too hard. Always practice

under qualified supervision. Using impact equipment can help to develop accuracy; however it is important to remember that punch-bags and focus-mitts do not fight back. A one hundred percent hit rate on focus-mitts will in no way guarantee you the same rate of success in an all out fight.

Being accurate during a real fight is extremely difficult. The katas acknowledge this difficulty and use a variety of methods to ensure that blows have the best chance of landing accurately, for example holding the head in position for elbow strikes, making use of the predictable response etc. It is always the kata's intention to strike weak points, but the practicalities of combat mean that we should not expect to land blows at will, nor should we totally rely on a knowledge of striking points alone. It is important to be versed in all aspect of combat if we are to be competent fighters.

Having recapped on the importance of accuracy and the associated difficulties, we shall go on to look at the weak areas themselves. The subject of target areas is overlooked in many karate dojos because knowledge of them is not a requirement for sporting success. However, striking points were always considered a vital part of karate training. Every single blow throughout all the katas is directed at the weak points of the human anatomy. Knowledge of these points is vital if you wish to understand the combative applications of the karate katas.

At the time karate was being formulated, the predominant medical theories were the ones associated with acupuncture and many of the striking points were discussed in relation to those theories. In acupuncture there are fourteen main meridians, and it is along these meridians that Chi (life force) is said to flow. The majority of these meridians are associated with the body's organs, for example heart, lungs, etc. On these meridians there are numerous points where the acupuncturist can affect the flow of Chi associated with the organs and hence affect a person's health. Likewise, the martial artist could strike these same points in order to affect the body's organs and disable an attacker.

The theories of using the acupuncture points in this way were said to have been developed by a thirteenth century martial artist and acupuncturist called Zhang San-feng. In his quest to perfect his fighting system, Zhang San-feng experimented on

animals and even bribed jailers to allow him to test his methods on prisoners who had been condemned to death. The striking points associated with karate are thought to be based on those used by a Ming Dynasty Taoist called Feng I-Yuan. It is said that he used his method many times in combat and was never defeated. It is believed that the points recorded in the Bubishi are Feng I-Yuan's.

The Chinese never cut open dead bodies to see how they worked as it was considered a great taboo. As a result their medical knowledge was based solely upon observation. To the martial artist it mattered little why these points worked, so long as they did! I have steered clear of using acupuncture terms and theories to explain the workings of striking points. This is because I feel that these theories can make things unnecessarily complex, I do not believe in the existence of Chi and I wish to keep all discussions grounded in scientific fact. There are also some variations in opinion with regards to how the associated acupuncture theories apply to these points. Once such theory is Five-Element theory. In this theory, each meridian is assigned an element (wood, earth, water, fire and metal). This theory is then used to determine in which order various points should be struck. For example, if a metal point had been struck, it would then be followed by a strike to a wood point because "*metal cuts wood*" etc. However, some sources state that Five-Element theory applies to points throughout the whole body. Whereas, other sources state it only applies to the lower parts of the limbs. There is even some disagreement on the direction of the Chi flow within the meridians (some martial sources stating that the direction of the flow is opposite to that stated in standard acupuncture theory). This is not to say that we should completely abandon these theories, because attempts at using kata movements in this way have been successful. If you are a believer in Chi, I'd recommend that you consult some of the very informative books and video tapes that are now available on the subject. (Rick Clark's book *Pressure Point Fighting* is particularly good. It covers the way acupuncture points apply to kata in a very scientific and structured way. I thoroughly recommend you read it.) I am a sceptic when it comes to Chi and prefer to use more scientific terms, as did Gichin Funakoshi in his book *Karate-Do Kyohan*. If we are to trust our lives to

these striking points, then it is vital we have confidence in them. It is hoped that by referring to nerves, arteries etc, as opposed to meridians and chi flow, the reader will find the subject matter easier to digest. The points remain the same; it is simply the terms used to describe their effects that differ.

The knowledge presented here is done so with the intention of helping the practising martial artist to further understand their art and the concepts upon which it is based. Do not misuse this information. Whilst many martial texts show the location of these points, few describe their effects. The effects of these points are described here so that the reader will have the knowledge to ensure that their practice is safe, and that their responses to the violent behaviour of others are appropriate and justifiable.

It is important to understand that there are no 'safe' striking areas. A strike to anywhere on the human body can have severe effects, for example a kick to the shin could cause the recipient to fall which, should their head hit the floor, could result in a fatality just as a blow to the throat would. It is hoped that the descriptions of the effects of these points will act as a reminder of the seriousness and brutality of combat, and will further encourage the reader to take every possible action to avoid unnecessary altercations.

Weak areas of the head and neck

Coronal suture: Tendo

This point is located on the top of the head, on the centre line of the skull. It is a very dangerous point that if struck hard enough will cause death. This is due to the frontal bone dislocating and causing severe damage to the motor regions of the brain. The Bubishi refers to this and the next point as the 'sacred gates' and warns against striking them due to the possibility of death.

Frontal fontanel: Tendo

This point is located on the centre line of the head where the forehead curves to meet the top of the skull. A hard blow to this point can result in death due to the damage caused to the brain and the cranial nerves. The Bubishi includes these first

two points in a list of 'restricted locations' due to the fatal consequences of a blow to them.

The temple: Kasumi

This point is located on the side of the head, about one inch back from the eye. This is the only part of the skull that curves inwards and is hence structurally weak. A solid strike to this point can be fatal due to the underlying areas being damaged. The meningeal artery runs under this point and should it be severed a massive haemorrhage would result. This haemorrhage will compress the brain resulting in coma and ultimately death. This point should only be considered in life or death situations.

Orbital bones: Seidon

This is the area surrounding the eye. A solid blow here will shock the frontal lobes of the brain and unconsciousness will result.

The eyes: Gansei

Striking or clawing at the eyes can have very serious consequences. Temporary or permanent blindness will result depending upon the strength of the strike. A light blow will cause the eyes to water profusely and hence the recipient will be unable to see clearly. A heavy blow will damage the bulb of the eye and will undoubtedly result in permanent blindness. Although striking the eyes is extremely effective, it also has very severe consequences.

Glabella: Uto

This striking point lies at the top of the nose, directly between the eyebrows. A blow to this point will shock the frontal lobes of the brain resulting in unconsciousness. A heavy blow may well cause death due to damage caused to the brain.

Philtrum: Jinchu

The Philtrum is the area directly below the centre of the nose, just above the gum line. At this point the nerves are very close to the surface of the skin and even a light blow will result in pain and cause the eyes to water. A heavier blow will result in unconsciousness. The upper jawbones are firmly attached to the

brain case and hence a blow to this area will shake the brain. It is this shaking of the brain that will cause the recipient to pass out. There is also a strong chance that a blow to this point will cause the recipient to lose some teeth. Should these loose teeth – and the resulting blood – find their way into the windpipe, respiratory paralysis and death may result. An extremely heavy blow to this area can dislodge the skull from the spinal column. This will traumatise the brain stem and result in instant death. This point can also be attacked by digging in with the knuckles whilst vibrating the hand from side to side. This action can produce severe pain, but will leave no lasting damage.

Centre of the jaw: Gekon

This point is located in the hollow where the lower lip and chin meet. A blow delivered straight into this point will result in dizziness or unconsciousness due to the shock being transmitted into the inner ear and the brain being shaken. There is also the possibility of broken teeth. A rising blow to the underneath of the jaw can cause a whiplash injury to the neck. A very powerful blow may dislocate the skull from the top of the spinal column, which will result in instant death.

Lower edge of the jaw: Mikazuki

Striking the lower edge of the jaw will shake the brain and cause unconsciousness. It is possible that the jaw could be broken or dislocated (especially if the mouth is open at the moment of contact). In addition to the pain experienced, control of the tongue will be lost and hence there exists the possibility of choking. The facial nerve may also be damaged which will leave one side of the face paralysed. Whether this paralysis is temporary or permanent depends upon the severity of the damage done. Hitting the base of the jaw, where the notch is found, inward and upwards at a forty-five degree angle will strike the nerve directly. This will also result in unconsciousness because of the vast influx of 'data' into the brain.

Cavity behind the ear: Dokko

This point is located in the cavity where the ear meets the jaw line. It is here that the facial nerve can be most easily attacked.

A strike toward the back of the jawbone will result in severe pain and some disorientation due to the inner ear being effected. This point can also be gouged using the knuckles or thumbs to facilitate the application of neck cranks.

*Figure 1:
Double thumb gouge to
Dokko from Bassai Kata*



Third intervertebral space: Keichu

This point is located just under the base of the skull on the centre of the neck. It is at this point where the spinal column has the least amount of support from any surrounding tissue, and is hence at its weakest. A blow to this point can result in unconsciousness, paralysis or death. This point must never be struck in any but the most extreme of circumstances. An inch either side of this point, where the muscles of the neck attach to the base of the skull, is the occipital bone which covers the cerebellum. This is the part of the brain that controls muscular movement and a blow to this area can result in disorientation and unconsciousness.

Carotid sinus: Matsukaze

This striking point is located at the side of the neck, to the front of the sternocleidomastoid muscle. A blow to this point will stimulate the baroreceptors associated with the carotid artery. The sole function of these baroreceptors is to monitor the pressure of the blood flowing to the brain. A strike to this area fools the body into believing that the blood pressure is too high. In response to this stimulus, the heart will slow down, the

veins will dilate, the arteriolar smooth muscle will relax and the heart will pump less blood per contraction. This will draw blood away from the brain, which will cause the recipient to pass out. The vagus nerve runs alongside the carotid sinus at this point. Hence, the blow will also disrupt many of the organs of the body including the lungs, stomach, intestines and heart. Applying pressure to this point, as in a strangle hold, will also result in a loss of consciousness. This point is very potent and can have fatal effects. The point is also very close to the throat, which may also be effected by the blow.

Suprasternal notch: Hichu

This point is located at the front of the neck just below the throat and above the sternum. At this point the windpipe is only covered by the skin of the neck and is hence very vulnerable to attack. A blow here will crush the cartilage of the trachea, which will result in death by suffocation. The Bubishi lists this point as a 'restricted location' and warns against striking it because of the severe consequences. It is also possible to push this point with the fingers in order to cause pain and force the opponent to move away from you. This point should only be attacked in the most extreme of circumstances.

Weak areas of the torso

Collarbones: Murasame

A heavy blow to a collarbone could result in it being snapped in two. Because of the muscular and mechanical linkages associated with the collarbones, the opponent will be unable to use their arms. It is also possible that the jagged ends of the broken bone will be pulled downward which could sever the subclavian artery. This could be fatal depending upon the severity of the damage.

Sternal angle: Tanchu

This point is located around five centimetres directly below the pit of the neck. It is here that the bones of the manubrium and sternum meet. A solid blow to this point will break the juncture of the two bones and will result in trauma to the heart, bronchus, lungs, thoracic nerves and pulmonary arteries. The

result of this trauma could very well be death, and it will certainly result in unconsciousness at the very least.

Xiphoid process: Kyosen

This point is located on the centre line of the body at the lower end of the breastbone. The xiphoid process is a small piece of cartilage at the lower end of the sternum. A powerful rising blow to this point will bruise the heart, liver and stomach. The result of this bruising will be unconsciousness, possibly even death. This is a very dangerous point that is never needed in acupuncture.

Solar plexus: Suigetsu

This is the soft point found in the centre of the chest, just below the xiphoid process. Even a light blow to this area will shock the diaphragm, which will result in the recipient being unable to draw breath. A powerful blow can injure the stomach and liver, may cause internal bleeding and can result in unconsciousness. This point has very little protection, such as a covering of bone or muscle, which results in it being extremely vulnerable to attack.

Fifth and sixth thoracic vertebrae: Kassatsu

This striking point is found in the centre of the back, roughly level with the lower ends of the shoulder blades. Blows to this point will affect the spinal cord, heart, lungs and aorta. A light blow will have a stunning effect, which will interfere with breathing. A heavier blow may result in paralysis or death.

Subaxillary region: Kyoei

This point is located on the side of the ribcage, just under the armpit between the muscles of the chest and back (fourth intercostal space). A strong blow will result in trauma to the lungs and associated nerves, which will result in difficulty breathing. This point can also be gouged to good effect. Digging into this area with a single knuckle, and then moving it up and down whilst maintaining pressure, will cause the opponent considerable pain.

The fifth and sixth ribs: Ganka

Located on both sides of the body around one inch directly below the nipples at the ends of the fifth and sixth ribs. A blow to this point will cause trauma to the lungs and associated nerves, which will result in difficulty breathing. A blow to this point may also fracture the ribs with comparative ease due to their structure at this location. This could result in the lungs themselves suffering injury.

Seventh intercostal space: Denko

Located on both sides of the body approximately four inches across from the lower part of the solar plexus. The effects of this blow depend upon which side of the body has been struck. A blow to the right-hand side will affect the liver. The costal cartilages of the seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth ribs lie directly above the liver at this point, hence a blow to this area will affect the function of the liver and can result in internal bleeding. The effects of this blow can prove to be fatal a long time after the blow is struck if permanent dysfunction of the liver results. A blow to the left-hand side will affect the stomach and spleen, which also lie directly beneath the ribs at this point. The damage to the stomach may result in vomiting. The spleen – being a major blood reservoir of the body – can be damaged fairly easily and this will result in internal bleeding. Blows to either side can result in shock and loss of consciousness. The function of the lungs may be disrupted due to temporary paralysis of the diaphragm.

Lower back (kidneys): Ushiro denko

This striking area is located on both sides of the lower back, either side of the eleventh thoracic vertebra. A blow here will damage the kidneys and their associated nerves and blood vessels. The kidneys are fairly delicate organs that have a rich supply of blood. This makes them particularly prone to haemorrhage when injured. A blow here can result in shock and can prove fatal.

Floating ribs: Inazuma

The eleventh and twelfth ribs are called ‘floating ribs’ because they are not connected to the breastbone. Because they are not

attached at one end they are much easier to break than the other ribs. A blow to the right side of the body will affect the liver, whereas a blow to the left side will affect the stomach and spleen. The floating ribs are located at the lower part of the ribcage on either side of the body.

Figure 2:
*Double strike to
floating ribs and the
base of the skull from
Neiseishi/Nijushiho*



Lower abdomen: Tanden

This point is located around one inch below the navel. A downward blow delivered here will affect the bladder, lower large intestine, femoral arteries and the genitals. Shock and extreme pain are the likely effects of such a blow.

Coccyx: Bitei

This point is located at the tip of the spine or 'tailbone'. The coccyx is part of the spine and a blow here will affect the entire spinal cord. The coccyx is also directly above the sacral plexus, which is where all the major nerves of the lower limbs originate. A blow to this point will affect all these nerves and will result in extreme pain.

Testicles: Kinteki

The testicles are very delicate organs and are loaded with nerves. A blow to the groin can result in pain, shock, nausea, vomiting, unconsciousness, difficulty breathing and possibly even death. The testicles may also be grabbed during grappling.

Although an attack to the groin will be completely incapacitating, it can be difficult to land such an attack. Most men will instinctively protect the groin, and the protection provided by clothing can often make securing a hold difficult.

Weak areas of the arms and hands

Upper arm: Wanjun

This point is located on the outside of the arm just below the shoulder muscle, and between the biceps and triceps. A strike here will affect the radial nerve, which will cause pain and a weakening of the arm. A blow to the inside of the arm, between the biceps and triceps, will affect the radial, ulnar and medial nerves, which will again cause pain and weaken the arm.

Elbow: Chukitsu

This point is located about one inch up from the point of the elbow and is often referred to as 'the funny bone'. A strike to this point will affect the ulnar nerve, which will weaken the arm and produce pain in the arm and shoulder. Just down from the elbow joint on the inside of the forearm is the superficial branch of the radial nerve. A strike to this area will cause pain in the forearm and will result in a weakening of the muscles that control the hand. Throughout the katas this point is often struck in response to the opponent securing a grip.

Inside of the wrist: Uchi shakutaku

Located on the inside of the forearm, between the radius and ulna, about one inch up from the crease of the wrist. A blow to this point will damage the median nerve, which will produce a sickening pain and a reduction in the opponent's ability to maintain a grip.

Figure 3:
*Knuckle strike to the
inside of the wrist
from Jitte Kata*



Outside of the wrist: Soto shakutaku

Striking the area just up from the back of the wrist will again affect the median nerve. As before, a blow here will result in a sickening pain and a reduction in the opponent's ability to maintain a grip.

Back of the hand: Shuko

The two main weak points of this area are found between the thumb and index finger (exposed radial nerve) and between the knuckles of the middle and ring fingers (meeting of the radial and ulnar nerve). A sharp blow to these areas will result in extreme pain in the hand and arm of the opponent. A blow to anywhere else on the back of the hand will also produce pain due to the damage caused to the bones of the hand. Digging your knuckles into the back of the opponent's hand and then raking them back and forth can be a useful way to break an opponent's grip.

Weak areas of the legs and feet

Inguinal region: Yako

The inguinal region is the area at the front of the leg where the thigh joins the torso. A strike to this point will affect the femoral nerve, femoral artery, femoral vein and genitofemoral nerve. This will result in great pain and a severe weakening of the leg. A strong blow could also result in temporary paralysis of the

thigh muscles. This area can also be gouged during grappling using the thumb.

Sciatic nerve: Ushiro inazuma

This point is located on the back of the leg just below the buttocks. The sciatic nerve is the largest nerve of the body and plays a major part in the control of the hamstring and lower leg. A solid blow to this point will produce cramping, loss of control over the leg, and pain in the hips and abdomen.

Vastus lateralis: Fukuto

This point is located half-way down the outside of the thigh. The vastus lateralis is the large muscle running down the outside of the upper leg. A blow to this point will produce pain and cause temporary paralysis of the thigh.



Figure 4:
Knee to fukuto from
Chinto/Gankaku Kata

Shins: Kokotsu

A kick to the shins is very painful and frequently results in the opponent bending at the waist. A kick delivered around two-thirds of the way down the shin will hit the deep peroneal nerve, which will cause a sharp pain and a weakening of the lower leg. Control over the foot may also be reduced.

Lower calf: Kusanagi

A kick to the lower part of the calf will cause pain and temporarily paralyse the muscle. This will greatly reduce the opponent's ability to move.

Instep: Kori

A stamping blow to the top of the foot will affect the medial plantar nerve, deep peroneal nerve and superficial peroneal nerve. This will result in pain in the leg, hip and abdomen, and loss of control over the leg.

Summary

There are other weak points found in the human body, but the ones listed are the most important. The points discussed are the ones most frequently used by the kata, and hence a good understanding of them is required if you are to understand the katas themselves. We have included this information so that you can better understand the concepts upon which the katas are based. The information in this chapter should also help you to ensure that your practice is safe, and that your responses to the violent behaviour of others are appropriate and justifiable. Above all, we hope that this chapter will serve as a reminder about the seriousness of violence and why every true martial artist should do everything in their power to avoid unnecessary conflict.

Chapter 8

Pre-emptive striking

As we have already discussed, the katas are all about surviving real situations. It therefore stands to reason that the katas will record strategies that give their practitioners the best chance of thwarting unwarranted aggression in a real situation. To my mind, the most important strategy in this regard is to be pre-emptive. What I mean by 'pre-emptive' is that we should attack as the opponent prepares to attack us, rather than wait for them to deliver the first strike.

In recent years there has been much debate about the legitimacy of pre-emptive striking. Some support the method stating that action is always faster than reaction, and emphasise the importance of seizing the initiative in high-risk situations. Others object to the method on ethical grounds. Gichin Funakoshi's famous quote, "*karate ni sente nashi*" (There is no first attack in karate) is normally used to justify this stance.

As a traditional karateka, it is my belief that training should revolve around self-development and self-defence. We do not wish to produce training grounds for thugs, nor do we wish to fail to equip our students to deal with society's violent minority.

The issue of pre-emptive striking certainly raises many issues. One thing that both camps agree on is that fighting is to be avoided whenever possible. It is what to do when fighting cannot be avoided that causes the debate. There can be very few martial artists who believe that the individual has no right to fight back. The question, therefore, seems to be, "*At what point is the use of force legitimate?*"

I believe that ‘karate-do ni sente nashi’ and the pre-emptive strike are in no way mutually exclusive and can exist side by side. To my mind, once an assailant has decided to attack us, the attack has begun. We are then well within our rights to use whatever methods are appropriate to ensure our safety. Obviously we can’t read our opponent’s mind, so we must look for physical indications that an attack is imminent. If an individual is behaving in an aggressive way whilst attempting to invade our personal space then there is a strong possibility that their verbal aggression is about to escalate to the physical. This verbal assault is an attack in itself and waiting until the attack becomes physical is foolhardy in the extreme.

In his book *Karate-do Kyohan*, Gichin Funakoshi wrote, “*When there are no avenues of escape or one is caught even before any attempt to escape can be made, then for the first time the use of self-defense techniques should be considered. Even at times like these, do not show any intention of attacking, but first let the attacker become careless. At that time attack him concentrating one’s whole strength in one blow to a vital point and in the moment of surprise, escape and seek shelter and help.*” This is exactly what many of those who teach the pre-emptive strike recommend. It is interesting that the preceding quote states, “...at that time **attack** him...” as opposed to, “...at that time wait until the assailant attacks before countering.” It would seem that once all other options have been exhausted, Funakoshi had no problem with the pre-emptive strike as a means to facilitate escape.

I believe the pre-emptive strike to be a ‘defensive’ method in so much as it is a way to avoid an unprovoked assault. Striking an individual when they did not initiate the assault would undoubtedly be in contradiction of ‘karate-do ni sente nashi’. However, I feel that being pre-emptive, when one is convinced that the aggressive intentions of others can in no way be avoided, is ethically just.

Acting pre-emptively is also often scorned because it is said that all the katas begin with a defensive technique. Much has been written about how this underlines the importance of not striking first. Indeed, all the katas do begin with defensive techniques, some of which are pre-emptive! The opening salutation and movement of Passai (Bassai-Dai) is a good



Figure 1

example. The opponent is moving towards us while shaking their fist in a threatening manner. Rather than waiting for the attack to become physical, the kata advises us to seize the opponent's wrist and place the palm of our free hand on the back of their hand (**Figure 1**). Move the hands into the salutation position to drop the opponent (**Figure 2**). Should the opponent resist the push on the salutation, the kata tells us that as an alternative we can take our weight past the opponent and to the side in order to complete the throw (**Figure 3**). This is a pre-emptive response to defend us against an imminent physical attack. The opponent has merely acted in an aggressive fashion and the kata regards this as justification enough for action to be taken.

There are many other examples of the katas being pre-emptive. The sequence shown in Figures 4, 5 and 6 is found near the start of Pinan Nidan (Heian Shodan). The assailant pokes the chest as they close the distance (**Figure 4**). Seize the opponent's extended finger and bend it back whilst moving the body backward away from any potential strike



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

(**Figure 5**). Keep hold of the opponent's finger whilst stepping forward to strike the opponent before fleeing (**Figure 6**).

Although there are many differing pre-emptive techniques found throughout the various katas, in the interests of realism it is far better to practice one simple technique that you can make your own. It must be remembered that whilst today it is fairly common to practice a large number of differing katas, in the past the founders of karate would practice one or two in great depth. It is very important that we do not overload ourselves with many unnecessary techniques because this will undoubtedly result in indecision and hesitation whilst we decide which of our thousands of techniques we are going to use! This is of particular importance with pre-emptive techniques. I favour the use of a right-handed open hand strike to the face whilst my left-hand controls the distance (**Figures 7 and 8**). I'm aware of other methods, both from within the katas and from other sources, but that is the strike that I feel most comfortable with. I'd encourage you to either take a technique directly from the kata, or to adopt the broad principle and use any other

method, and develop a pre-emptive strike that you can practice and make your own.

The practice of pre-emptive striking can be found as part of everyday practice within Wado-ryu (whether it is recognised as such is a different matter). On the Wado-ryu syllabus we can find Tobo-Komi-Tsuki which is a head punch that is delivered from natural stance before assuming a fighting posture. The technique has no preceding block and would appear to be contrary to ‘karate-do ni sente nashi’ if the prevailing interpretation of ‘there is no first attack in karate’ were correct. I believe that Otsuka intended that this technique should be used as an assailant was preparing to launch an unprovoked attack and, by including it in his style, acknowledged the importance of practising such methods. Otsuka – like Funakoshi – also emphasises pacifism and the importance of avoiding conflict wherever possible, and in no way advocates striking an individual who is not preparing to launch an attack. In his book *Wado-Ryu Karate*, Otsuka wrote, “*There is nothing as unfortunate as finding one’s self in a situation where he must utilise martial arts to protect himself. The objective of martial arts training is to train hard and yet search for a state where martial arts need not be used. Hence, one must seek the path of peace and desire that path as well.*”

Acting pre-emptively has always been a part of Budo. In the classic text on strategy ‘Go Rin No Sho’ (*The Book of the Five Rings*), Miyamoto Musashi tells us of three methods to forestall the enemy, one of which is “*attacking on the enemy’s preparation to attack*”. This is exactly what we are doing when we deliver a pre-emptive strike. If we attacked when the enemy was not preparing to attack, then we are acting in a manner inconsistent with the ethics of the martial arts. If, however, the opponent is preparing to attack, then we are simply gaining the initiative and ensuring our safety.

Once the initial strike has been delivered, we should seize the opportunity to flee. If we continued to strike the opponent we would be morally (and in all probability, legally) in the wrong. We would also be putting ourselves at risk should the opponent have accomplices that we were not previously aware of. The pre-emptive strike should not be used to settle arguments or as a means to weaken an individual to enable us to give them ‘a

good kicking'. What we are talking about is the legitimate use of a pre-emptive strike, when no other options are available, in order to distract the assailant in the instance of unprovoked attack so that we can escape. If the pre-emptive strike is used in this way, than I believe it is in no way contrary to 'karate-do ni sente nashi' (and judging by the quote from *Karate-do Kyohan*, neither did Gichin Funakoshi).

If we do not gain the initiative, and the chance to escape that it provides, we will be forced to fight (if we are still able). This could result in far greater violence being committed either to our opponent or ourselves. As true martial artists, we should always desire to cause as little damage to our opponent as is necessary in order to ensure our safety. If we do not act pre-emptively, we will be forced into a position of having to ensure that the opponent cannot function rather than merely being sufficiently stunned to ensure our escape.

Another important consideration is the strong possibility of multiple opponents. If we do not seize the initiative in this situation we are putting ourselves at great risk. When setting the standard of 'karate-do ni sente nashi' I do not believe that it was the intention of the masters to ask us to act in a manner that would give society's violent minority the advantage, but to ensure that we do not become part of that minority. Some would say that by striking first we are "*lowering ourselves to their level*". I strongly disagree with this statement because when a true martial artist is forced into the position of having to use a pre-emptive strike, it will be with a sense of regret. They will have done everything possible to avoid and defuse the situation and now must use force if their safety is to be assured. Compare this with the assailant who is using force for personal enjoyment or financial gain, who will feel good about the infliction of pain and far from avoiding violence, has actively sought it out.

'Karate-do ni sente nashi' is a reminder to us to always avoid violence, to never fight as a result of ego and only fight to ensure our safety (or the safety of others) in the instance of unprovoked attack when no other options are available. I do not believe the intention was to demand that a woman who has just been informed by a knife-wielding assailant that she is about to be assaulted, and who has no means of escape, must

wait until the knife is actually thrust towards her before she may act! Striking on the opponent's preparation to attack, when we cannot initially escape, is a just and legitimate method. It is supported in the writings of past masters, contained within the katas and (to my mind) is fully consistent with 'karate-do ni sente nashi'.

Chapter 9

Entrance and exit techniques (Iriguchi-waza and deguchi-waza)

As a reader of this book, you must have an interest in the original karate techniques that are recorded within the katas. You, like many others, are no longer content to practice karate as a basic kick/punch system and wish to practice karate in its entirety. In order to extract the original techniques from the katas it is important that you have a good understanding of the principles upon which the katas are based. In this chapter I would like to discuss the principles associated with 'entrance and exit techniques' as I feel that this important aspect of Bunkai-Jutsu is largely ignored. There are many different names attached to these techniques (eg 'pre-kata and post-kata') but I feel the terms 'entrance and exit' – as coined by Mr Patrick McCarthy (whose books and videos I highly recommend) – are the most appropriate.

We must understand that the katas were designed by fighters for fighters, and hence they often take a basic knowledge of combat for granted. Two fundamental combative principles, which must always be observed, are the importance of keeping everything as simple as possible, and the importance of seizing and maintaining the initiative.

We will look at the importance of keeping it simple first.

When fighting, your adrenal reaction will reduce your body's ability to utilise fine motor skills. Therefore, it is extremely

unlikely that you will be able to apply any overly complex movements. Furthermore, you should always keep your number of initial responses to an absolute minimum. If you have learnt many different actions for a given situation, by the time you have decided which one to use, the situation will have changed. In the moments before the altercation, you should use a well-practised pre-emptive strike. If you are already past that point, and engaged in grappling, you should still keep your initial grappling techniques as simple, and as few in number, as possible. In this way you will respond quickly and effectively with the minimum of hesitation. So it makes sense that, when formulating karate, its founders would have constructed a set of techniques to be used the instant the fight hits grappling range. And they did!

Another error that must be avoided when studying bunkai is the tendency to interpret and express the katas in a way that is overly defensive. When fighting it is important to seize, and then maintain, the initiative. You should aim to fight at your pace and on your terms, rather than let the opponent dictate the fight. It is quite common to hear statements such as, *“If the opponent seizes your wrist, you can respond with this bit of the kata.”* Why has the opponent seized your wrist in the first place? It is hardly the most savage of attacks. Do you just stand there so the opponent can do as they please? – *“Wait ‘till you grab my wrist, then you’re gonna get it!”* Remember that the katas take into account the instinctive responses of the opponent (not to be confused with ‘trained’ responses).

The principles associated with ‘one blow-one kill’ run right the way through karate, with the aim always being to end the fight as quickly as possible. One quick and sure way to end a fight at grappling range is to seize the opponent’s testicles. The groin is an area that most men will instinctively protect. Whilst attempting to grab the groin there is a strong chance that the opponent will attempt to check the attack. If you are successful in seizing the opponent’s groin, then the fight is yours. If you are not successful, then the opponent may well secure a firm grip on your wrist in order to prevent any further low attacks. This is where the *“the opponent has seized your wrist”* techniques come in! The opponent seizes your wrist because they are forced to! If they don’t, then you crush their testicles. If

Entrance and exit techniques (Iriguchi-waza and deguchi-waza)

they do, you apply the kata's techniques to disable the opponent and free your arm. These 'entrance techniques' – such as the groin grab – are often not shown by the kata. The main reason is because they are so obvious! However, you must understand their purpose and be aware of their existence if you wish to be able to effectively apply the techniques and principles of kata.

There are three main entrance techniques associated with the katas. One is grabbing the testicles and the other two are seizing the throat and gouging the eyes. All of these techniques will cause great damage to the opponent and should only be applied in the most extreme circumstances. Although the popular view may be to the contrary, it is not that kata techniques are ineffective that is the problem. The problem is that kata techniques are too effective! The katas were designed for use against violent and untrained attackers, and hence the techniques of the kata are often very brutal and direct. They certainly never take legal repercussions into consideration. Be sure to only apply the techniques described above if the situation justifies them. Always do whatever is in your power to avoid combat and never use more force than is required to ensure your safety.

We will now go on to discuss the three main entrance techniques, and the kata techniques that flow on from them in more detail. One way in which the various grips can be dealt with is found at the start of Pinan/Heian Sandan.

*Figure 1:
Soto-uke*





*Figure 2:
Step up
'double block'*



*Figure 3:
'Double block' on
the spot)*



The kata then turns and the whole sequence is repeated on the other side. The seventh movement of Pinan/Heian Sandan is a ninety-degree turn, so that the practitioner is now facing straight forward, as another soto-uke is executed. The first three movements deal with a clinch where the karateka's right hand

*Entrance and exit techniques
(Iriguchi-waza and deguchi-waza)*



Figure 4



Figure 5

is higher than their left (**Figure 4**). The kata then turns in order to tell us what would be appropriate if the grip were reversed (left hand high, right hand low). The final movement of this sequence (movement seven) tells us that whichever hand has been seized a ninety-degree turn completes the technique.

Seizing the testicles

From a clinch, a quick way to end the fight is to reach down and seize the opponent's testicles. In this instance the attack to the groin is best executed using the left hand because it is the lowest. As previously mentioned, a likely response from the opponent is to reach down and check the grab (**Figure 5**). Executing the first movement of Sandan will allow you to gain control of the opponent's arm. Rotate the captured arm as you seize the opponent's elbow and pull it towards you (**Figure 6**). The second movement will lock the opponent's shoulder. Lift the opponent's elbow as you push down on their wrist. At the same time, turn your forearm in



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

order to break the opponent's grasp and take hold of their wrist (**Figure 7**). The ninety-degree turn of movement seven, whilst continuing to pull and push, will then increase the pressure on the opponent's shoulder so that they can be forced onto the floor (**Figure 8**).

Eye-gouge

Great damage can be caused to the opponent by applying pressure to the eye using the thumb. From the clinch shown in Figure 4, it is easiest to attack the eyes with the right hand because it is highest. If the technique is successful, then the fight is over. If not, a likely counter will be that the opponent will

reach up and seize the wrist in order to move your hand away from their face (**Figure 9**). The third move of Sandan could then be used to lock the opponent's arm in a similar way to before. Pull down on the opponent's wrist as you push their elbow upward. At the same time, turn your forearm and seize the opponent's wrist. This will break the opponent's grasp and lock their arm (**Figure 10**). As before, a ninety-degree turn,



Figure 10



Figure 11

whilst continuing to pull and push, will force the opponent onto the floor (**Figure 11**).

Seizing the throat

Seizing the throat is a quick way to end the fight at grappling range. It is important to understand that it is the throat that should be seized as opposed to the neck. The fingers should be pushed in and behind the windpipe before pressure is applied (**Figure 12**). This is a very common choke that is found throughout the katas. With regards to a follow-on technique should the wrist be grabbed; you'll find that the position will be exactly the same as Figure 9. Hence, that part of Sandan will work for both gouging the eyes and seizing the throat.



Figure 12

If any of the preceding entrance techniques were successfully applied, then the fight would be over. If not, there is a strong chance that the opponent will seize your wrist in order to move your hand away from their face or groin. This is where the releases and counters associated with wrist grabs come into

play. When fighting in this way, it is you who constantly has the initiative, not the opponent.

All three entrance techniques are extremely easy to apply. That is why the katas favour them. As soon as we begin to grapple in a high-risk situation, the first thing we attempt is one of the three entrance techniques. This will reduce the options available to us and ensures quick and decisive action. If the opponent counters, we are then in a position to use the numerous kata techniques for dealing with a trapped hand.

It stands to reason that if there are entrance techniques then there should also be exit techniques. And there are! It is a common error for the kata to be interpreted in a way that would allow the assailant to continue their assault. All kata techniques should, at the very least, leave the opponent in a position where they are completely vulnerable. In some instances this may mean that, although the opponent is extremely vulnerable, they have not been completely incapacitated. An example of this is the arm-lock takedowns from Pinan/Heian Sandan which were shown earlier in this chapter. Although the opponent is on the floor with an injured shoulder, they may not be completely incapacitated. To ensure that the opponent does not continue their initial assault, the karateka may wish to employ an 'exit technique'. Before we discuss exit techniques in more detail, I feel it is important to point out that they should not be confused with the addition of techniques because the misinterpretation of the kata leads to the opponent not being disadvantaged in any way! A common example of this misinterpretation is when we see kata movements interpreted as blocks with strikes clumsily added onto the end of the sequence because the kata itself didn't actually do anything to stop the opponent! Such interpretations go against the principles of bunkai, the sound combative principles upon which the katas are based, and show poor understanding of the kata in question.

If we go back to our arm-lock and takedown from the start of Sandan, we can see that although the opponent has been disadvantaged, they have not been rendered completely harmless. Hence, an exit technique may be appropriate. In extreme situations, the exit technique could be a stamp kick (**Figure 13**), or it could simply be running away. Kata

*Entrance and exit techniques
(Iriguchi-waza and deguchi-waza)*

techniques will always leave the opponent very vulnerable (when correctly interpreted). However, if the opponent remains a threat, even if it is a greatly reduced one, then you should not stop there just because the kata does. You should apply an exit technique that will either completely incapacitate the opponent or put considerable distance between you. Running away is obviously the preferred option if you are able to do so safely.

Entrance and exit techniques are an extremely important part of the combative side of karate. They are never complicated. In fact, they are so simple that the kata often does not bother to show them. However, you must be aware of their existence if you wish to effectively express your katas in combat. To successfully interpret your katas, you need to understand that they were designed by fighters for fighters. You need to be aware of what they show and what they don't, and why what they don't show can sometimes be more important than what they do.



Figure 13

Chapter 10

Tegumi (Grappling)

Tegumi is the term used to describe the grappling side of karate. 'Tegumi' is also used to describe an indigenous style of wrestling practised in Okinawa, although differing districts did use other names. The term 'Tegumi' was used in the Naha district, whereas 'Mutou' was used in the Tomari and Shuri districts. However, today it is 'Tegumi' that is the favoured term for this aspect of karate. Regardless of the term used, it is believed that the indigenous grappling methods developed by the Okinawans had a large influence on what was eventually to become known as karate.

To defend yourself in a real fight you will need a knowledge of all the various ranges of combat. In a sporting contest there is no need for skills at every range, for example a boxer will not need a knowledge of kicking in order to win his bouts, nor will a competitive judoka need a knowledge of punching. However, in a real fight the opponent will not play by the rules. If you find yourself in an unfavourable position there will be no referee to interject and to restart the bout at a range where the combatants know what they are doing! As Geoff Thompson once said, "*You can be a 10th Dan on your feet, and a white-belt on your back.*" With this in mind, it stands to reason that the older versions of the martial arts would cover every range. To omit any range could very well lead to defeat in combat. The original fighting techniques and concepts of karate are recorded within the katas. Therefore, it stands to reason that the katas will contain techniques and concepts for use at every range.

The grappling and seizing aspects of karate are rarely practised today, but it is important to understand that grappling was once as much a part of karate as the striking techniques most commonly associated with the art today. Shigeru Egami, in his book *The Heart of Karate-do* wrote, “*There are also throwing techniques in karate... Throwing techniques were practised in my day, and I recommend that you reconsider them.*” Gichin Funakoshi also makes reference to grappling techniques in *Karate-Do Kyohan*. Funakoshi wrote, “*...in Karate, hitting, thrusting, and kicking are not the only methods, throwing techniques and pressure against joints are included.*” All of karate’s grappling techniques are recorded within the katas, and it is within the katas we need to look if we wish to resurrect this vitally important, and sadly undervalued, aspect of karate.

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight some of the main principles and concepts of Tegumi, so that the reader may better understand this aspect of their katas. For a more detailed look at karate grappling, I recommend you consult my book *Karate’s Grappling Methods* and the accompanying video tapes. (Details can be found at the end of this book.)

Throws and take-downs

In his book *Karate-Do Kyohan*, Gichin Funakoshi shows several of karate’s throwing techniques and informs us that all of them should be studied by referring to the basic katas. There are essentially three different types of throw: hand throws (*te-waza*), hip throws (*koshi-waza*), and leg throws (*ashi-waza*). This categorisation is done on the basis of which is the main part of the body used to throw the opponent. If it is mainly the hands, then the throw is a hand throw etc.

It is important to understand that a good throw will utilise the entire body. These categories are merely a convenient way to split the throws into groups and in no way suggest that a leg throw only uses the legs etc. It is simply a case of which body part is most heavily used. All three types of throw can be found throughout the katas.

One key principle with regards to throwing is the need for the opponent to be unbalanced. If the opponent is stable they will find it fairly easy to oppose your technique. Throws work

best when the opponent has been unbalanced and is distracted.
As an example, we will look at the following sequence from
Naihanchi/Tekki kata:

*Figure 1:
Upward punch*



*Figure 2:
'Block'*





*Figure 3:
Tap the opposite knee
with the foot*



*Figure 4:
Move the arms
across*



It is known that Choki Motobu, who specialised in Naihanchi, taught a great many throws associated with this kata. Here is one example of how this part of Naihanchi can be used to unbalance an opponent.

The opponent has seized your lapels with both hands. An upward strike is delivered into the opponent's eye and upwards onto the underside of their eyebrow. This could knock out the opponent, but should they remain conscious the blow would severely distract them. The blow will also throw the opponent's



Figure 5



Figure 6

head back and straighten their arms (**Figure 5**). Your forearm is then slammed onto the opponent's forearms, just below the creases of the elbows. This will cause the opponent's head to come forwards. This sudden change in direction may whiplash the opponent's neck, and hence further weaken them. The opponent's head will now be close enough to allow the hair to be seized (**Figure 6**). Now that the opponent is weakened and slightly off balance, you should move your foot across (as the kata does) to sweep the opponent's foot off the floor. This will result in the opponent's balance being completely broken (**Figure 7**). The opponent's hair is then pulled in the direction of their loss of balance. This will cause the opponent to fall to the floor



Figure 7



Figure 8

(**Figure 8**). If the opponent should have had their other foot forwards, the kata goes on to instruct us to sweep the corresponding leg, and then push the opponent's head in order to throw them. In this technique, it is mainly the use of the foot that results in the opponent falling to the ground and hence the throw would be classified as an 'Ashi-waza' (leg throw).

This sequence from Naihanchi gives one example of how the opponent's balance can be broken, and how they can be distracted in order to set them up for a throw. In my own Dojo we use the phrase, "*Blow before throw*" to remind us of the importance of striking and weakening the

opponent before throwing. It is important to clarify that the aim of the initial blow is to drop the opponent. Only if they remain standing do we make use of the blow's distracting effect in order to set them up for the throw.

In a high-risk situation, blows should never be delivered with anything less than full force because your aim is to end the fight with every single strike. You should always use striking in preference to grappling.

Another important principle with regards to throwing is the need for good leverage. The following movement is from Passai (Bassai-Dai) and gives an example of good leverage at work:



Figure 9:
'Double block'

*Figure 10:
Turn, 'lower
block'*



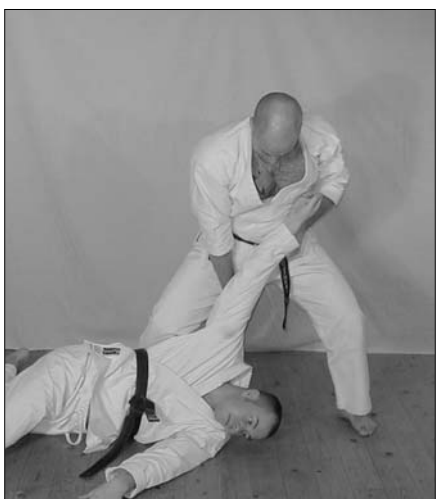
One of the applications for this movement is a 'cross-buttocks' throw. As an aside, this throw was extremely popular with bare-knuckle boxers before the advent of modern rules/safety standards which meant the demise of the grappling side of boxing.

*Figure 11:
Initial grip*





*Figure 12:
Turn and lift*



*Figure 13:
Throw*

A look at Figure 12 shows how the legs have been used to lift the opponent. Also note how the back of the hips are used as a pivot point to take the opponent over. It is also vitally important to ensure that your centre of gravity is lower than your opponent's when initiating throws of this type. Since the hip is the key player on this throw, it would be classified as a 'Koshi-Waza' (hip throw).

In addition to ensuring good leverage when lifting the opponent, it is also important to ensure good leverage when moving the opponent in the horizontal plane. Earlier in Passai the following movement is found.

Figure 14:
180-degree
turn, 'inner-
block'



One of the applications of this movement is a winding-throw.

Take hold of the opponent's arm as you feed your opposite arm under the opponent's armpit. Be sure to keep the opponent's arm as close as possible to your body. At the same time, step in with your opposite foot and straighten your leg (**Figure 15**). Turn sharply, whilst keeping the opponent's arm close, in order to force the opponent over your straight leg and onto the floor (**Figure 16**). In this instance good leverage is achieved through the good use of centrifugal force. The good grip and strong turn ensures that the force at the centre (your hip movement) is amplified at the outside (opponent's movement). The opponent has little option but to move in the direction of the pull, and the straight leg ensures that they are tripped up and forced onto the floor. The arms are the prime mover in this throw, and hence it would be classed as a 'Te-Waza' (hand throw).

When analysing your katas be sure that any throwing interpretation uses the fundamental principles of distraction, unbalancing and good leverage.



Figure 15



Figure 16

Grips

There are a great many ways to seize the opponent and knowledge of these grips is vital if you are going to be able to control an opponent at close range. Any successful strike, throw, lock, etc, at grappling range is dependent upon your ability to grip, and hence control, your opponent. Essentially there are two types of grip: seizing the opponent's clothing and seizing the opponent's body. If the opponent's clothing is strong enough, it can be used to help secure an effective grip just about anywhere. If, however, the opponent's clothing is flimsy, it may rip and other options need to be considered. The techniques of the kata use both types of grip.

An example of using the clothing to control the opponent can be seen later in this chapter in Figure 33 where the opponent's shoulder is seized in Chinto/Gankaku kata. Another use of the opponent's clothing to secure a grip can also be seen in Figure 38 where a strangle is applied from Pinan/Heian Godan. In the following photographs we can see a variety of grips from the katas that do not rely upon clothing. Since you can never rely on the opponent's clothing being strong enough to support any particular technique, the katas generally prefer to use the sort of grips shown in Figures 17 to 21.



*Figure 17:
Hooking
hand/neck grip
from Seishan*

*Figure 18:
Hair grip from
Naihanchi/Tekki*



*Figure 19:
Ear grip and head
smash from
Neiseishi/Nijushiho*





*Figure 20:
Double 'fish
hook' from
Seishan/Hangetsu*



*Figure 21:
Arm grab and
forearm strike from
Naihanchi/Tekki'*

One grip that needs special attention is the hikite (pulling hand). Throughout the various kata movements it is very common to see one hand pulled back to the hip. This hand is referred to as the 'hikite'. If you ask most of today's karateka they will tell you that the hand is being held in a "*ready position*" or that it is there for aesthetic purposes. If we remember that every single move in kata is for use in combat, and that kata has no superfluous movements, it becomes obvious that the hikite must serve a purpose. It is not simply sitting there in readiness! In Gichin Funakoshi's 1925 book *Rentan Goshin Karate Jutsu*, there is a short paragraph devoted

to the use of the hikite. He writes, “*Here the meaning of the hikite, or pulling band, is to grab the opponent’s attacking band and pull it in whilst twisting it as much as possible so that his body is forced to lean against the defender.*” It would seem that the true meaning of hikite is to control and twist the opponent’s limbs so that they become unbalanced (**Figure 22**). When analysing your kata be sure that the use of the hikite is not overlooked.

All of the grips shown so far are used to deliver or augment an actual technique. There are other more general grips that are taken during the rough and tumble of the fight in order to control the opponent’s motion. Because these grips are not directly associated with the application of a technique, they are often not shown by the kata. Remember that the katas were designed by fighters for fighters, and hence they often take a certain amount of knowledge for granted.

We will now look at some of the main grips associated with Tegumi. The first grip requires one arm to be placed over the opponent’s arm so that it takes hold of the triceps. The other arm goes under the opponent’s arm and onto their back (**Figure 23**). A variation on this grip, which was commonly employed during competitive bouts in Okinawa, is to extend the arms in order to seize the opponent’s belt or waistband



Figure 22



Figure 23



Figure 24



Figure 25

(**Figure 24**). Another Tegumi grip places one hand on the back of the opponent's neck whilst the other is placed on top of their forearm (**Figure 25**).

In the rough and tumble of a live fight, however, it is simply a matter of controlling the opponent in whatever way is applicable at that moment in time. It is important to practice changing and adapting all of the various grips so that control of the opponent is maintained at all times. One thing that you must fully understand, however, is that controlling the opponent in this manner is only a means to an end. We control the opponent in order to create the opportunity to deliver decisive techniques. Controlling the opponent without the delivery of such techniques will inevitably lead to defeat.

There are many holds recorded in the katas. All of these can be used as presented, or they can be modified and combined. Grips are a vital part of close-range fighting. You must ensure that you give this aspect of Tegumi plenty of attention when studying kata.

It is also important to understand that the katas also provide instruction on how to counter these grips. If we look at the opening movements of Chinto/Gankaku kata we will see the following sequence:

*Figure 26:
Step back and
raise the arms*



*Figure 27:
Bring the
arms down*





*Figure 28:
Lead hand punch*



*Figure 29:
Back hand punch*



This sequence is a counter to the opponent seizing the back of your neck in an attempt to control your movement. The kata instructs us to drop back as we push the arm off the neck so that it becomes both trapped and hyper-extended (**Figure 30**). The arm is then locked so that the opponent's head is positioned for the following strike (**Figure 31**). Control the opponent's arm using the hikite whilst a lead hand punch is delivered to the base of the opponent's skull (**Figure 32**). Seize the opponent's shoulder and deliver a strong rear hand punch (**Figure 33**). We have seen counters to the lapels and wrists



Figure 30



Figure 31



Figure 32



Figure 33

being seized in earlier chapters, and we will look at a few more counters to grips later on in this book.

Chokes and strangles

Chokes and strangles (Shime-waza) are extremely effective when correctly applied. Once the choke or strangle is securely on, the opponent can do little to escape and will normally lapse into unconsciousness in a matter of seconds. If the hold is kept on for any length of time after unconsciousness has set in, brain damage or even death may occur. Chokes and strangles are very dangerous techniques that must always be practised with great care whilst under qualified supervision.



Figure 34



Figure 35

Chokes and strangles can be broadly placed into two categories: those that rely on the opponent's clothing for leverage, and those that do not. The ones that do not rely on clothing are often referred to as 'naked' chokes or strangles. In a real situation, it is these naked chokes and strangles that will be of most use because they can be applied regardless of the opponent's attire. That said, if the opponent's clothing is strong enough to support the technique, then their clothing can be used to your advantage.

The difference between a choke and strangle is that a choke cuts off air, whereas a strangle cuts off blood. Chokes are applied across the windpipe and prevent the recipient from taking air into the lungs. You must exercise great caution when practising chokes, as it is very easy to damage the windpipe. In olden times the choke would be applied in such a way as to deliberately damage the windpipe! However, it is important to remember that today's martial artist will face legal consequences as a result of their actions. Such extreme techniques should only be applied when no other options are left available. Strangles are applied to the carotid sinuses and prevent oxygenated blood from reaching the brain.

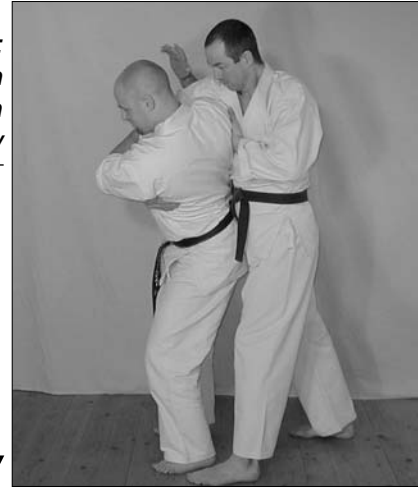
One of the most common chokes found within the katas is 'sealing the breath'. The thumb is placed on one side of the windpipe and the fingers are placed on the other side. The fingers are then closed to constrict the windpipe and prevent the opponent from breathing. The following movement is found in Passai (Bassai-Dai) kata (**Figure 34**). The opponent has grabbed your clothing and thrown a hook punch towards your head. The kata instructs us to move inside the effective range of the punch and simultaneously seize the opponent's throat and testicles. The Bubishi refers to this technique as, "*holding something in place to prevent it from moving*". Another common way to choke the opponent is to apply pressure using the forearm. In the example from Pinan Godan (Heian Godan) we can see how the opponent's head is

pressed tightly against the body whilst the forearm is used to constrict the windpipe (**Figure 35**).

The two techniques shown attempt to seal the windpipe and are hence classed as chokes. We shall now go on to look at some examples of strangles as they are found within the katas.

The following sequence is found in Pinan Godan (Heian Godan) and is most commonly misinterpreted as a punch (where you don't look at the target!), a leap over a low weapon attack (the wielder of the weapon then disappears, as this interpretation does nothing to remove the threat), followed by a block to a kick (which is again not countered, would probably result in broken forearms and leaves the face extremely vulnerable to attack!). A more practical application is as follows:

*Figure 36:
Seize the opponent in
preparation for a
shoulder throw*



*Figure 37:
Execute
the throw*





Figure 38:
*Drop the knee onto the
opponent in order to injure
and control, and then apply
a cross-strangle*



Figure 39



Figure 40

Notice how on the final movement of this sequence the opponent's clothing is grabbed and the forearms are used to apply pressure to both sides of the neck. This will put pressure on the carotid sinuses and will cause the opponent to lapse into unconsciousness in a matter of seconds.

At the end of Pinan Godan (Heian Godan) there is found a move that is often misinterpreted as a lower block to the front and an outer block to the rear. It is hard enough to block anything in a live fight, never mind two techniques at once, one of which you haven't even seen! A more practical application is a simultaneous arm-bar and neck-crank (**Figure 39**).

From this position it is possible to slip the hand that is applying the neck-crank behind your own neck. The kata then instructs us to bring the feet closer together. As the foot comes in, squeeze the opponent's neck to effect a strangle (**Figure 40**). On both these examples it can be seen how pressure is applied to the carotid sinuses in order to render the opponent unconscious.

When analysing your katas be sure to look for techniques which could be used to seal the windpipe or apply pressure to the carotid sinuses. Chokes and strangles are highly effective methods for use at close range, and hence one would expect to see them many times throughout the various katas. Chokes and strangles are there, but they are often overlooked, as

many karateka do not understand the principles and concepts upon which they are based.

Other important aspects of grappling are joint-locks and ground fighting. There are many different joints in the human body, all of which have their own unique weaknesses. It was, therefore, thought that the kata's principles associated with joint locks should be covered in a separate chapter (the very next one as it happens!). How the katas record and express their ground-fighting methods also requires a thorough explanation. Therefore, the subject of ground fighting will be covered separately in Chapter 12.

Be sure that you understand the basic principles associated with throws, grips, chokes and strangles. If you fail to have an appreciation of the basics of Tegumi, you will fail to interpret and express your katas effectively. Don't concentrate on the techniques. Dig deeper and try to fully understand the principles at work. Once you have gained an understanding of the principles associated with one throw, you have effectively gained a knowledge of the principles associated with all throws! As Gichin Funakoshi wrote in his book *Karate-Do: My Way of Life*, *"Once you have completely mastered one technique, you will realise its close relation to all other techniques."* When analysing your katas be sure that the principles are looked for and adhered to. In this way, you will grow to understand your katas and be able to effectively express them in combat.

Chapter 11

Kansetsu-Waza (Joint locks)

In this chapter we are going to look at the main concepts and principles associated with the joint locks of the karate katas. There are two main reasons why it is important to fully understand these principles:

1. Without a good understanding of the core principles, you will be a very limited fighter who will be unable to adapt to changing situations. This will mean that you will be unable to express the kata effectively in a live situation.
2. If you don't understand the principles associated with the kata's joint locks, you won't recognise these principles in action. Hence, you will not be able to correctly interpret what many kata movements are actually for.

There are many joints throughout the human body, all with their own distinct strengths and weaknesses. That said, the ways in which these weaknesses are exploited by the katas are common. So before we look at the weaknesses of each joint, it is important to understand the principles upon which the Kansetsu-waza of karate are based.

Push/pull

The majority of joint locks found within the katas use a push/pull action to exert the greatest possible pressure against the natural motion of the joint. This two-way motion can also make the technique very difficult to resist due to the confusing effect it will have on the opponent. If the force was only exerted in one direction, the opponent may be strong enough to oppose that force. Two forces acting in differing directions

are much more difficult to resist. This is because the opponent will now be experiencing double the initial force (with no extra effort from you). The two forces will also complement each other in achieving a common goal, and are, therefore, greater than the sum of their parts. Finally, the application of two forces at once will cause greater confusion in the opponent's mind and this will delay any attempted counter.

The following finger lock is found near the start of Pinan Nidan (Heian Shodan), and was previously shown in Chapter 8.



*Figure 1:
The opponent's finger
has been seized*



*Figure 2:
The opponent's finger
is locked*



If we take a close look at the finger lock we will be able to see push/pull at work. If you look at the motion of the hand, you will notice that the topside of the fist is pushed forward, as the bottom side of the fist is pulled in the opposite direction. In the

kata, the whole fist is also moved downwards, but it is this push/pull action that will cause the opponent the greatest pain.

Not all examples of this push/pull motion are equal and opposite as in the previous finger lock. The following sequence is found at the start of Pinan Yodan (Heian Yodan) kata.

*Figure 3:
Step to the left*



*Figure 4:
Move to the right*





*Figure 5:
Move the lead leg in as
the hands are pulled to
the hips*



*Figure 6:
Step forward with the
left foot and perform
'lower cross-block'*



The first two movements are identical and are performed on both sides. This is to emphasise that the technique can be used on either the opponent's left or right side and, therefore, the kata practices the movement on both sides. The first movement shows what should be done if the opponent's right hand was trapped. The second movement shows what position should be assumed if the opponent's left hand was trapped. The third and fourth movements obviously follow on from the second movement and would need to be reversed if it was the right hand that was trapped.

We shall show the application of this sequence assuming it is the left hand that has been trapped, as this is probably the

easiest to follow. During the fight, the opponent's left wrist has been seized. Move to the outside, so that you are sideways to the opponent. Place the edge of your free hand just above the opponent's elbow joint (**Figure 7**). Pull on the opponent's wrist as you push onto the weak area just above their elbow joint. Simultaneously shift your weight in the direction of the pull (as per the kata) in order to enhance the execution of the technique. This will cause the opponent to move away from the lock, so that their head will be positioned directly in front of you (**Figure 8**). Seize the opponent's shoulder in order to prevent them from moving. The body weight is then shifted forwards as a punch is delivered to the base of the opponent's skull (**Figure 9**).

This technique illustrates a number of important Bunkai-Jutsu and Kansetsu-waza principles. Examination of Figure 8 again shows the concept of push/pull being applied. The wrist is pulled as the elbow joint is pushed. Try this application yourself. If you only pull the wrist, or only push the elbow, your partner should find it fairly easy to resist the lock. When you have tried the movements separately, try applying them together (as the kata does) and the resulting effect will be radically different. The vast majority of the locks found throughout the katas use the principle of push/pull and it is vitally important that you understand it.

Good leverage

When attacking a joint it is important to ensure that your position affords you the greatest possible leverage. This will ensure that the lock is as painful as possible. It will also minimise the amount of physical strength needed to apply the lock. The joint locks of the kata always use good leverage and never rely solely on physical strength.



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

As a 205-pound fully grown man, I have had children in their early teens drop me to my knees through the good use of leverage. The children applied their locks correctly and I, as a much stronger adult, was powerless to resist. In these instances I allowed the children to get into the correct position before applying the lock. This was done to demonstrate to the class the effectiveness and importance of using leverage to their advantage. These demonstrations can also be used to boost the confidence of some of the more retiring children. The laughter (at me) and any accompanying round of applause always brings a smile to the face of my juvenile conqueror. However, I always point out – as I am doing now – that I allowed the child to get into the right position! It is vital that children do not labour under the illusion that they could drop an adult with such ease in the real world. I am always greatly concerned when I see pictures in martial arts books and magazines that supposedly depict children effortlessly defeating adults. I believe this to be the height of irresponsibility! A child should be encouraged to do everything possible to avoid inappropriate physical contact from adults. Leading a child to believe that they could defeat an adult is both dangerous and a lie! A child has no chance of defeating an adult, especially with the complex little wrist locks most often shown.

There are a few points that you'll need to consider in order to achieve optimum leverage. One of great importance is the correct positioning of the fulcrum (pivot point). The locking techniques of the kata always use part of the body to act as a fulcrum.



*Figure 10:
Arm-lock from
Seipai Kata*

*Figure 11:
Arm-lock from
scarf hold*



The locks shown in Figures 10 and 11 give two examples of the use of a correctly positioned fulcrum. In the example from Seipai, the left forearm is positioned as a fulcrum and the opponent's arm is pushed downwards over it. In this instance, the fulcrum is positioned just above the elbow (as it is on many straight arm locks). If the fulcrum (forearm) is moved away from this point, the effects of the lock will be greatly reduced. On the ground-fighting example, the thigh is used to provide the fulcrum. However, exactly the same principles are at work. Notice how the positioning of the fulcrum (this time the thigh) is exactly the same as before.

On both techniques you can also see another principle associated with good leverage at work. This is that the 'lever' used should be as long as possible in order to create the greatest possible force. Notice how the opponent's arm is seized at the wrist so that the distance from the fulcrum is as large as possible. Moving the hand up the forearm will make the technique much more difficult to apply and will also greatly reduce its effect.

The direction of force and the positioning of the fulcrum depends upon which technique is being used and which joint is being attacked. The katas give clear instruction on how to gain the greatest possible leverage (when they are correctly performed and understood).

Mechanical advantage

By correctly positioning yourself and using your body weight, you can give yourself a 'mechanical advantage' over the opponent. This use of the laws of physics means that, once again, your techniques will take much less muscular effort to apply. If we take a second look at the sequence from Pinan Yodan (Heian Yodan) shown in Figures 7 to 9, we can see mechanical advantage being used to good effect. As the lock is applied (Figure 8) notice how the lead foot is pulled in so that the weight is transferred in the direction of the lock. This effectively means that the weight of the karateka is projected through the opponent's elbow. Obviously, this will generate a much greater effect than simply trying to apply the lock with the arms alone. A look at Figure 9 also shows how the body weight is then transferred to ensure that the follow up blow has the greatest possible effect. The use of body weight to make a technique as effective as possible (strikes, locks, throws, etc) is consistently emphasised by all the katas. When analysing your katas it is vitally important to consider the direction of the body shift, and how this shift can be used to enhance the technique being applied. The correct use of body weight is a fundamental concept that must be understood, so that it can be freely expressed, if effective combat skills are your aim.

Take another look at Figure 8 and observe how close the arms are to the body. The closer the arms are to the body, the greater the mechanical advantage gained. The katas constantly instruct us to pull our hands towards us, or step towards the opponent, so that our arms are close to our body (centre of gravity) and hence mechanically stronger. If we attempted to apply the lock shown in Figure 8 whilst the arms were away from the body, the opponent would find the technique much easier to resist. This is because the hands are away from the centre of gravity and hence the effect of body-shift (movement of the centre of gravity) is greatly reduced. When the hands are pulled in towards the body, they are closer to the centre of gravity as it shifts, and therefore the effects of that shift are more efficiently transferred. It is for this reason that the correct use of the hikite (pulling hand) is so strongly emphasised in the teaching of traditional kata. The fact that the opponent's arm is pulled towards you will obviously also mean that it is further

away from their centre of gravity, as well as being closer to yours. So not only will the use of hikite increase your mechanical advantage, it will also decrease the opponent's. Throughout the katas, whenever you see a hand close to the body, you should consider the very strong possibility that the hand is controlling part of the opponent's anatomy. It is also important to remember to keep your hands close to you when practising Kansetsu-waza (as per the kata) in order to make the techniques as effective as possible.

Confusion and distraction

If the opponent has a clear idea of what you are attempting to do, they will find it much easier to thwart your attack. The joint-locking techniques of the katas frequently attempt to confuse the opponent. This is done on both a conscious level and by using the body's instinctive responses. The Bubishi tells us, *"If you want to attack east, first move west. Never reveal your true intentions."* This should not be interpreted in such a way that your techniques become overly complex, or that you stop trying to end the fight there and then, but instead take a roundabout route. It simply means that if you were going to pull the opponent, it would be prudent to push them first. This will mean that when they transfer their weight to resist the push (probably by pushing back) they are unwittingly aiding the impending pull.

There are, of course, many other ways to distract and confuse the opponent. In *Karate-Do Kyohan* Gichin Funakoshi tells us that we can distract the opponent by stamping on their foot, shouting and even by spitting in the opponent's face (for hygiene purposes it's probably better to omit the last one from dojo practice!). The katas show some of these methods of distraction, but others are omitted (the spitting for example). Remember that the katas were designed by fighters for fighters. A good fighter would understand the importance of confusion/distraction. Therefore, the kata doesn't always show the confusion/distraction part, as they take it as read that you understand this aspect of fighting and repeatedly showing this idea would be both tiresome and unnecessary.

Another aspect of confusion/distraction is the rapid progression from one technique to another. This progression can either be intentional or the result of the opponent thwarting the initial



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14

technique. Before we go on to look at an example from the katas, remember that in a live fight the instant you get the chance to flee you should take it without hesitation. If the first technique affords you the opportunity to flee, then take that opportunity! Don't move on to subsequent techniques if the opponent has already been incapacitated enough to allow your escape. The opponent may regain their presence of mind or their accomplices could join them.

A good example of the rapid progression of techniques is found in Pinan Godan kata. An attempt to crush the opponent's testicles is checked (**Figure 12**). Quickly place your free arm under the opponent's wrist (fulcrum point) (**Figure 13**). Pull your arms towards you in order to cause pain and lock the wrist (mechanical advantage) (**Figure 14**). The opponent will instinctively rise onto their toes in an attempt to alleviate the pain (distraction and predictable response). Then thrust both hands upward in order to break



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18

the opponent's grip. Keep contact with the opponent's arm in order to maintain control (Muchimi) (**Figure 15**). Push down strongly on the opponent's elbow as you apply a slight upward pressure on the wrist (push/pull, confusion, predictable response, Muchimi and good leverage) (**Figure 16**). Keep hold of the opponent's wrist. Pull the hand to your hip, as a punch is delivered to the base of the opponent's skull (mechanical advantage and close-range control) (**Figure 17**). Seize the opponent's shoulder and step forward to deliver a final strong blow to the same point (**Figure 18**).

Notice how, early on in the sequence, pain is used to distract the opponent. This pain will cause the opponent to rise on to their toes before they are quickly moved in the opposite direction. Following this rapid up/ down motion, the opponent is then struck, which will again disorientate them. The opponent is then controlled before a final decisive strike is executed. The whole sequence is performed rapidly and is a fine example of how the katas use the principles associated with confusion and distraction.

Muchimi

Muchimi refers to controlling the opponent's limbs without actually grabbing them. The arm lock shown in Figures 15 and 16 is an example of Muchimi. So is the leg-lock using the inner-circular stance shown in the chapter on stances (Figures 28 and 29) and the arm lock from Pinan Shodan/Heian Nidan in Chapter 5 (Figure 8). This ability to 'stick' to the opponent is utilised throughout the various katas as a way to lock or control the limbs.

In the past, this skill would be developed through the practice of various drills, particularly two-man kata/bunkai practice, but today this vitally important skill is rarely acknowledged or practised. Real fighting is incredibly messy and you'll need to be sensitive to the opponent's movements if you are to be able to create and exploit opportunities. You cannot rely upon sight alone; your sense of touch also needs to be developed (particularly at close range – which is where most fighting occurs anyway). In much of modern-day karate, grappling and close-range fighting skills are omitted and hence the sensitivity required to employ the concept of Muchimi is not developed. Regular practice of kata bunkai, along with kata-based sparring, will help to develop the required skills.

In some instances, the limbs stick to the opponent in order to create an opening for a strike. The following sequence is found at the start of Kushanku kata (Kanku-Dai).

*Figure 19:
Opening position*



*Figure 20:
Arms are raised*



*Figure 21:
Both arms arc
to the sides*





*Figure 22:
When the hands
touch step to
the left*



Figure 23



Figure 24

The movement shown in Figure 22 is then repeated to the right. This signifies that the movement can be applied using either hand. The application for this sequence is a counter to an attempted double grab. The opponent's hands are thrust forwards, which results in your own hands being thrown up in an instinctive fashion (**Figure 23**). The arms are then moved out and down (**Figure 24**). The opponent's arms are now controlled using Muchimi (notice how the opponent's arms are not grabbed). Either one of the opponent's arms is then seized. Turn sideways (as instructed by the kata) and deliver an edge of hand strike to the opponent's carotid sinus (**Figure 25**). There are many other examples of Muchimi throughout the katas (and elsewhere in this book). It is vitally important that you familiarise yourself with this concept if you are to be able to interpret and apply the katas correctly.

Attack the weaknesses of the joints

When we are striking the opponent we should endeavour to aim our strikes at the weak points of the opponent's body. Likewise, when applying joint locks it is important that we apply these locks in such a way that we attack the weaknesses associated with the joints. All the joints of the human body have a limited range of motion. All joint locks work by taking the joint in question beyond, or against, its

natural range of motion. The joint-locking techniques of the kata dislocate joints, twist bones, and separate tendons from bone. The weaknesses and limitations of all the joints of the human body are mapped out within the katas. Knowledge of these limitations is extremely important if you are going to correctly interpret the katas.

We shall now look at the various joints of the body and briefly discuss the weaknesses associated with each. I strongly recommend you acquire a good book on physiology in order to progress your studies further.

The neck

Before we look at the weaknesses of the neck, it is vital to remember that attacking the neck (even in practice) can have severe, possibly fatal, consequences. Great care must be taken with these very dangerous techniques. Only ever practice whilst under qualified supervision.

The neck is made up of seven vertebrae. Each of these vertebrae has a relatively small range of motion, but used together the range of motion of the neck is comparatively great. The neck has a significant range of motion when moving back and forth. When twisting to the side, the motion of the neck is limited to around ninety-degrees in either direction. As with many joints, twisting the vertebrae in more than one direction at once will cause the most pain/damage through the combined limitations of movement.

The sequence shown in Figures 26 and 27 is found at the start of Jion kata. The opponent has grabbed your clothing. A simultaneous slap to the face and knuckle strike to the nerve point behind the ear (dokko) is delivered (**Figure 26**). This movement is the application of the opening salutation. This technique will weaken the opponent and loosen the neck muscles. The opponents chin is then pushed up and to the right, whilst the back of the head is pulled down and to the left. At the same time, the kata instructs us to drop back into



Figure 25



Figure 26

Zenkutsu-dachi in order to exploit mechanical advantage (**Figure 27**). This neck crank is the application of the simultaneous ‘outer-block and lower-block’ and is referred to in the Bubishi as, “*an emperor holding the egg.*”

Another way in which the neck can be attacked is by pushing the head forward until the chin hits the chest and acts as a pivot point. This will stretch the neck and separate the vertebrae. Techniques of this nature are extremely dangerous. Attacks to the neck should only be applied in the most extreme of circumstances. A vigorously applied neck-lock could easily be fatal.



Figure 27

The shoulder joint

The shoulder has the greatest range of motion of all the joints in the human body. The shoulder is a ball and socket joint where the ball is larger than the socket so that only a small part of the ball is completely enclosed by the joint. The ligaments are also relatively weak. The shoulders are extremely mobile, very unstable joints and are hence quite susceptible to injury. The movements of the upper extremities are dependant upon the co-ordinated movement of the elbow, wrist and shoulder. The kata's locking techniques take full advantage of this interaction. By keeping the upper arm close to the opponent's body the shoulder blade's movement is limited and hence greater pressure can be placed upon the joint. See the lock from the start of Pinan Shodan/Heian Nidan shown in Chapter 5 for an example of this in action. If we take a close look at the Figure Four arm-lock shown in Chapter 5, Figure 9, we can see the effect that moving the opponent's upper-arm closer to their body has on the range of motion of the shoulder joint. If we apply the lock without pulling the



Figure 28

opponent's upper-arm close to their body, the arm will be able to rotate a reasonable distance before pain is felt (**Figure 28**). If we apply the lock again, but this time pull the opponent's upper-arm close to their own body, you'll see that considerably less movement is required before pain is felt by the opponent (**Figure 29**).

It is also possible to attack the joint by rotating the shoulder in the opposite direction. From the side four-quarter hold, take hold of your opponent's left wrist with your right hand. Feed your left arm under your opponent's upper arm and take hold of your own wrist (**Figure 30**). Turn your body by taking your right leg under your left leg. At the same time, rotate your arms so that the opponent's wrist is being pushed down while their elbow is pulled up (**Figure 31**). This motion will rotate the shoulder joint beyond its natural range of motion and could dislocate the joint.

The elbow

The elbow is actually made up of three joints. These three joints are mutually dependant and supportive. The joint of the ulna and humerus enables the arm to flex and extend, and it is this motion that is most frequently attacked by the elbow locks within the katas. The joints of the ulna and radius, together with the



Figure 29



Figure 30



Figure 31



Figure 32



Figure 33

joint of the radius and humerus, allow the forearm to rotate. Due to the structure of the joint, a hard impact to the elbow can make the humerus move forwards whilst the ulna moves backwards and this will result in a dislocated elbow. The elbow is capable of bending through an angle of around one hundred and forty degrees. The structure of the elbow joint does not normally allow the forearm to move any further back once the arm is straight – although some individuals do have a slightly greater range of motion. Many of the elbow-locks within the katas apply pressure to the straightened arm in order to take it outside its natural range of motion. See the locks shown earlier in this chapter (Figures 8, 10, 11 and 16).

The elbow joint also allows the forearm to rotate around one hundred and eighty degrees; beyond this the bones of the ulna and radius come together and prevent any further movement. This limitation is often attacked through the use of the opponent's hand as a lever. An example of this is found in Jion kata (**Figure 32**). Notice how the opponent's wrist is bent and their fingers are rotated upward and forwards. This technique is most often classified as a wrist lock, but it is in fact the structure of the elbow joint and the bones of the forearm that are under attack.

The wrist

The wrist is made up of two rows of four bones. The wrist joint itself is the connection of the radius to the first row of small bones.

The wrist joint is very mobile and can move around 130 degrees up and down and 60 degrees side to side. The techniques of the kata again aim to take the wrist outside its range of motion. The sequence we are now going to analyse is found in Chinto (Gankaku) kata and is most often labelled as an 'upper cross-block' followed by an inward pull (which is rarely attributed any significance). The opponent reacts to an

attempted eye-gouge by seizing the wrist (**Figure 33**). Quickly place your free arm between your opponent's forearm and your wrist (**Figure 34**). Pull your hands in and down in order to lock the wrist and bring the opponent's head forward (**Figure 35**). The wrist is bent forwards beyond its range of motion and the opponent will instinctively move forwards in an attempt to alleviate the pain. From this position the opponent is very vulnerable to being kned in the face (which is what the kata then goes on to do!).

Fingers

Each of the fingers is made up of three bones and two joints. Individually the fingers are weak; hence the finger locks associated with the katas attack one or two fingers at a time. Attacking more than two fingers at once results in a collective strength that prevents the fingers from being effectively manipulated. The range of motion of the fingers is significant when moving towards the palm, but is limited in the opposite direction once the fingers are straight. The fingers also have limited lateral motion. The majority of finger locks throughout the katas aim to bend the fingers back beyond their range of motion (as shown in Figure 2) or to move them to the side so that they are forced outside their limited range of lateral movement. The make up of the wrist and hand means that the thumb has much more lateral motion than the fingers. The thumb is also made up of more robust joints and is, therefore, less frequently attacked



Figure 34



Figure 35

The hip

The hip is a ball and socket joint, much like the shoulder, and is hence theoretically capable of a large range of motion. However, because the hips support the weight of the upper



Figure 36



Figure 37

body, the associated ligaments are fairly large. It is the size of these ligaments that limits the actual motion of the joint in practice. The ligament at the front of the joint is 'v' shaped and prevents the thigh from moving too far back. The hip can be injured by pulling the opponent's thigh backward as your body weight is dropped onto the back of the hip joint (**Figure 36**).

The same ligament also limits both the lateral motion of the leg and its outward rotation. The ligament on the inside of the leg also limits the lateral motion. The ligament at the rear of the joint – which is the weakest of the three – limits the inward motion of the leg. Because the hip joint is so very strong, direct attempts to lock it are very rare. Throughout the katas, the hip is more generally attacked indirectly by using the leg itself as a lever whilst another

other joint on the lower limbs is also attacked.

Knees

The knees are large and strong joints. The knee joint itself is made up of the bones of the femur (thighbone), the tibia (shin) and the patella (kneecap). These bones are joined by a connective tissue and are separated by cartilage. The knee joint allows the leg to bend in both directions, but once straight, the shin cannot move any further forwards. Look at the ground-fighting knee-lock shown. Notice how the backward movement of the shoulder, and the forward motion of the hips, forces the

knee joint outside its natural range of movement (**Figure 37**). The knee joint also does not permit any sideways motion. In both Kururunfa and Neiseishi (Nijushiho) a takedown can be found which unbalances the opponent by attempting to move the knee joint laterally (**Figure 38**). This lock also indirectly attacks the hip. The lower part of the leg is capable of limited inward and outward rotation. This limitation of the knee joint is commonly attacked indirectly through the seizing and rotation of the foot.



Figure 38

The ankle

The ankle joint is made up of connections between the fibula, tibia and the bones of the foot. There are a number of ligaments that support the ankle joint. The ligaments at the back of the ankle prevent the fibula and tibia from moving forwards. They also prevent the foot from twisting too far inward. The ligament on the outside of the ankle also prevents the foot from turning too far inward. The ligament on the inside of the joint prevents the foot from going too far backward and also limits its outward motion. This limitation of the ankle's motion is often attacked by pushing the forearm against the back of the opponent's ankle joint, whilst the shoulder is moved backward so that the opponent's ankle is hyper-extended (**Figure 39**).



Figure 39

It is important that you gain a good understanding of the principles associated with the kata's joint locks that have been discussed in this chapter. With a thorough understanding of these principles you will be better placed to understand the significance and purpose of many kata movements. Adherence to these principles is also vital if you are to ensure that your joint locks are effective.

Chapter 12

Karate on the ground (Ne-Waza)

Karate was formulated to enable the civilians of Okinawa to defend both themselves and their loved ones. As we discussed in Chapter 1, for long periods of their history the Okinawans were prohibited from bearing arms. This meant that only those who enforced the laws, and those who broke them, would be in possession of weapons. The remaining citizens, who obeyed the laws, would have no option but to learn effective empty handed fighting skills if they were to ensure their safety.

For civilians living in a country that also forbids the carrying of weapons, one would think that the karate system would be ideal for self-defence. After all, that is what it was originally created for. However, phrases such as, “*95% of real fights end up on the floor*” are frequently heard throughout the martial arts community at present. If karate is designed for real fighting, then why do the vast majority of karate schools totally omit ground-fighting? Did the past masters get it wrong?

If you study, as opposed to just practising, your katas, you will know that karate does contain a large amount of grappling. Techniques such as close-range striking, throws and takedowns, chokes and strangles, arm locks, leg and ankle locks, neck cranks, wrist locks, finger locks, etc, are all included within the karate katas. But what about ground-fighting? If ground-fighting is so important, where is it in the katas? There are a significant number of ground-fighting techniques within the katas if you

know where to look. One problem that the modern martial artist faces is the difficulties that arise from failing to appreciate the differences between sport ground-fighting and real ground-fighting. Remember that civilians designed the techniques recorded within the katas for use in the instance of violent and unprovoked attack. No sporting techniques will be found within the katas. Nor will you find the sophisticated methods needed to out wrestle a trained grappler.

In a mixed martial arts tournament (such as the Ultimate Fighting Championship) it is quite common to see contestants opt for the fight to go to the ground. This is a sound strategy if the contestant knows that they possess superior ground-fighting skills to their opponent. In today's society real fights are rarely one on one for any length of time and hence opting for a ground-fight is a sure way to get "*a good kicking*" from your assailant's colleagues (or anyone else who fancies a free shot). In the UFC, techniques such as biting, crushing the testicles, gouging the eyes, etc, are banned. Yet these are the norm (and a highly effective norm) in a self-defence situation.

Possibly the most significant difference between sport ground-fighting and real ground-fighting is the 'intent' behind the fight. In a sporting contest, your aim is to win the tournament. In a real fight, your aim is to assure your safety. In my Dojo, the ground-fighting practice revolves around the regaining of an upright position so that the student can flee. In a competition match, the strategy may well be: (a) take the fight to the floor; (b) keep the fight on the floor; (c) weaken and tire the opponent; (d) get the opponent to submit using the techniques allowed by the rules. In a real fight (and hence the method used in the katas) the strategy would be: (a) avoid going to the floor at all costs; (b) if the fight does go to the floor, regain your feet as quickly as possible; (c) if getting up is not immediately possible, then hurt the opponent using simple (probably brutal) techniques; (d) once back to your feet, escape and seek shelter or help.

The majority of ground-fighting methods taught within the martial arts at present are sporting methods derived from match fights. It is often the simplest methods that are the most effective, for example seizing the testicles. If these methods are banned, as in a sporting contest, then an alternative needs to be

sought. An interesting example of this is the ground-fighting methods found within contest judo. The art of judo is extremely effective. They are without doubt the premier grapplers of the martial arts community. However, it is a little known fact that, before 1900, judo did not possess the ground-fighting methods for which it is so renowned today.

As you'll probably know, it was Dr Jigoro Kano who developed the art of judo. The Kodokan (Kano's judo school) had gained a strong reputation for itself through its numerous victories in Randori Shiai (competition) when challenging other jujitsu schools. In 1900, the Kodokan arranged a match against the Fusen Ryu of jujitsu. At that time judo did not include the same ground-fighting methods that it has today. Kano had based much of his judo on the Tenshin Shinyo Ryu and Kito Ryu systems of jujitsu. Both of these styles were well known for their excellent striking skills and effective throws. Tenshin Shinyo Ryu and Kito Ryu were battlefield arts, designed by samurai, and as such aimed to spend as little time on the ground as possible. A samurai would, in all probability, be decapitated by the sword of a member of the opposing army if they remained on the floor for any longer than a few seconds. Hence, the jujitsu of the samurai did not contain the sophisticated ground-fighting methods associated with the art today.

The representatives of the Fusen Ryu realised they stood little chance against the Kodokan and decided to adopt an unusual strategy. When the fights began, the Fusen Ryu men laid down on the floor. Confused by what would be a suicidal movement on a battlefield (or in the street), the Kodokan men joined their opponents on the floor and were promptly beaten by the locks and chokes of the Fusen Ryu practitioners! This was the first loss Kano's men had suffered in eight years. If the Kodokan were to continue to dominate other jujitsu schools, then they needed to develop a full set of ground-fighting techniques for use in match fights (which, as we now know, they did to great effect). So we can see that many of judo's ground-fighting methods stemmed from competition fighting, as opposed to the methods that would be employed by a samurai on a battlefield. This does not mean they are ineffective, far from it, just that the samurai would avoid ground-fighting and would use more

brutal methods (that would be unsuitable for use in a sporting contest) if a ground-fight could not be avoided.

Just as ground-fighting holds and locks were spurned by the ancient samurai, they were also considered to be unsuitable by modern warriors such as Captain WE Fairbairn. He developed a system of unarmed combat that was so effective it became a part of the training for the Shanghai Municipal Police, the British Commandos, the American Marine Corp, the British Special Operations Executive and the American Office of Strategic Services during World War Two. Captain Fairbairn is a practical fighting legend. In his 1942 combat manual entitled, *Get Tough!* Captain Fairbairn wrote, “*You will have noted that no holds or locks on the ground are demonstrated. The reason for this is: THIS IS WAR.*” Captain Fairbairn goes on to explain that we should aim to regain our feet as quickly as possible, we are very vulnerable to attack whilst on the floor, that there is a vast difference between fighting on mats and on rocky ground or a road, and that the most important thing is to remain on your feet in the first instance if at all possible.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that ground-fighting holds, locks, submissions, etc, do not have a place. It is just that the more simple, direct and practical methods must be given priority in a real fight. In my own club we drill the holds and practice ground-fighting submissions (adapted from the katas) in our training. However, the emphasis firmly remains on avoiding going to the ground in the first place and regaining

our feet as quickly as possible should the worst happen (as it so often does).

Karate, as it was originally practised, was a brutal and violent system. It is this version of karate that is recorded within the katas. Throughout the katas the majority of close-range techniques begin with an attempt to seize the throat, gouge the eyes or crush the testicles, or sometimes a combination thereof (see Chapter 9). Any of these techniques will end a fight almost instantly (and that is why the katas favour them). Should these techniques



Figure 1

be thwarted, the katas contain numerous locks, strikes, throws, etc, that flow on from these initial techniques. It is important to understand that the katas record the key strategies and fighting principles of their creators. These strategies and principles are much more important than the techniques used to demonstrate them. When a fight hits the ground, the karateka would adopt the same strategy as used when vertical. If you can't get up instantly, then seize the throat, gouge the eyes or crush the testicles. Obviously, these techniques are only justified in extreme circumstances, but that is, after all, what kata is all about.

If we look at the following photographs, we can see the eyes being attacked from under the mount position (**Figure 1**), the groin being attacked from under the side four-quarter position (**Figure 2**), and the throat being attacked from the scarf hold (**Figure 3**). All of these techniques are effective, direct and infinitely easier to pull off than the highly skilled escapes associated with sport grappling. In addition to these

simple techniques, it is also possible to attack the opponent using the locks, chokes, strangles, etc, contained within the katas. The katas rarely demonstrate these techniques on the floor (they do on occasion), as the preferred option is to remain vertical. However, the principles upon which the techniques rest are consistent whether the techniques are applied vertically or horizontally. Choki Motobu once said, "*Learn to apply the principles of the katas, such that you can bend with the winds of adversity.*" So when discussing ground-work, in addition to the brutally simple methods contained within the katas, we are also



Figure 2



Figure 3

encouraged to adapt the kata's vertical grappling methods for use on the floor.

That is not to say that there are no ground-fighting techniques in the katas. Pinan/Heian Godan executes a cross-strangle to a thrown opponent who is now on the floor (see Figure 38 in Chapter 10). Kushanku contains a takedown into a floor-fighting neck crank etc, but these are exceptions rather than the rule. The katas prefer to demonstrate their grappling principles from a vertical position. This is because being vertical is the preferred option and the katas always encourage the correct strategy. Take a look at Figures 4 and 5.



*Figure 4:
Pinan/Heian
Godan: choking
technique*



*Figure 5:
Choking technique
on the ground*

In the choking technique from Pinan/Heian Godan, the opponent is unable to breathe because the airway is restricted due to pressure from the forearm. On the ground-fighting technique, the opponent is also unable to breathe because the airway is restricted due to pressure from the forearm! The principles being applied are identical, even if the physical position of the combatants is not. So whilst the principles can be applied vertically or horizontally, the kata prefers to show them vertically in order to encourage the karateka to remain vertical.

In some instances the katas even show specific ground-fighting techniques while in a vertical position! A good example of this is found in Wanshu/Enpi kata.

*Figure 6:
Turn and
execute
Gedan-barai*



*Figure 7:
Hitch forward
into Crane stance*





Figure 8



Figure 9

The application of this sequence is as follows. When fighting at close-range, reach around the back of the opponent's head and seize their hair while simultaneously taking control of their arm. Step around with your back foot and move your arm as in Gedan-barai in order to crank the opponent's neck and take them to the ground (**Figure 8**).

Hitch forward so that your lead foot is now positioned on the opposite side of the opponent's head. Your knees should be as close as possible to the opponent as you begin to crouch down. As you execute this movement be sure to keep control over the opponent's arm (**Figure 9**). Then just drop onto your back as in Juji-Gatame in order to lock the opponent's arm over the front of your pelvis (**Figure 10**). If you look at the final position you will notice that it is identical to the 'Crane-Stance' of Wanshu/Enpi. All that has happened is that the position has been moved from a vertical plane to a horizontal one! As previously mentioned, this type of technique, where a ground-fight is actively sought, is extremely rare in kata due to the inherent dangers of such methods. However, such a technique could be used effectively if the fight was one on one and took place in a secure or isolated location. Hence, you would expect to see one or two such techniques in existence. It is also important to understand that the katas sometimes show techniques in a differing plane from that in which they are applied, although this is a rarity. In the vast majority of cases, however, the katas encourage us to keep the fight upright. If we can't, then we

should continue to employ the principles of the kata in as direct a way as possible. The katas tell us how the various joints, arteries, etc, can be manipulated to best effect. Whether

these weaknesses of the human anatomy are manipulated when in a vertical or horizontal position is not relevant. (See the KGM books and tapes for numerous examples of kata techniques being used on the floor.)

Ground-fighting is a part of karate, as one would expect what with the art being specifically designed for civilian self-defence. The katas contain the correct principles, techniques and strategies to enable the karateka to defend themselves during a real fight (but not a sporting contest). The reason so many karateka omit ground-fighting (and grappling in general) is that the katas are often insufficiently studied and competition sparring does not allow fighting at close-range or on the floor. If we wish to practice karate as an effective and complete art then we must study the katas (not just practice them), extract the techniques and concepts they contain and then apply these methods in live sparring (see Chapter 15). We should also adapt and experiment with the katas techniques so that we are able to use them in numerous situations.

Karate (as contained within the katas) is a highly effective art that possess methods and strategies for use at every range. It is a complete system of fighting that was specifically developed for use by unarmed civilians. If you study the original karate (as contained within the katas) you will develop effective fighting methods regardless of the distance or situation.



Figure 10

Chapter 13

The true uses of 'blocks'

Action is always faster than reaction. You should always aim to take control of a situation and never fight in a defensive fashion. Blocks simply do not work in real situations. However, in sport-based sparring, blocks work fairly well. This is because the combatants use complementary techniques at an exaggerated distance. You will have a good idea of what techniques are coming, and you will have the space and time to react accordingly. Real fighting is much closer and much more chaotic. In a real situation, blocks are rarely of any use and hence the katas rarely contain them. However, they do contain many techniques that are misleadingly labelled as 'blocks' (see Chapters 1 and 4). If you are unconvinced of the limitations of blocking, then I suggest you try some heavy contact close-range sparring and see for yourself just how ineffective blocking is. Attack is definitely the best form of defence when you find yourself with no means of escape.

The modern interpretation of the katas often has every other move explained as a block. As mentioned in previous chapters, this is predominately due to Itsou's alterations and the modern karateka's failure to study the katas sufficiently. The word 'uke' is commonly taken to mean 'block,' but 'uke' can also mean 'counter-attack' or 'response technique'. The techniques that are commonly thought of as blocks would be better understood and applied if they were thought of as 'response techniques'.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

These responses are performed in order to seize the initiative and to secure a position of advantage. They do not simply attempt to stop an opponent's attack as a block would. There is a danger that repeatedly using negative language in training will result in the formation of negative combative attitudes. The very word 'block' invokes images of a defensive technique that does nothing to gain the advantage over the opponent. Whilst the term 'block' is now the label most commonly associated with the techniques in this chapter, you would be wise to use a more positive label.

The techniques that we will look at in this chapter are Age-uke (*rising response*), Gedan-barai (*lower sweep*), Shuto-uke (*knife hand response*), Soto-uke (*outer response*) and Uchi-uke (*inner response*). Each and every one of these techniques has many differing applications and it would be impossible to discuss them all here. I will show a couple of examples for each movement. Some of the other ways in which these movements can be applied have already been discussed in previous chapters.

Age-uke

The Age-uke has numerous applications. While it is of little use when applied as a block, it can still be used defensively. During the fight, your arm has come into contact with the opponent's (**Figure 1**). The opponent reaches up to seize your throat. Age-uke is performed in order to redirect the opponent's hand. Using the principle of Muchimi, you ensure that the opponent's arm remains in contact with your own. You will physically feel the opponent's movement, as opposed to using only the eyes, hence a quick response is more likely (**Figure 2**). The motion of the arm is then continued in order to take the opponent's arm off to the side. The opponent's

arm is then seized (hikite) so that they are vulnerable to a follow-up strike (**Figure 3**). This application is arguably the most basic. It is important to notice how the technique leaves the opponent in a vulnerable position (leaves an opening for a strike). It does not simply stop the opponent's attack. Remember, all kata techniques attempt to gain or maintain the advantage.

Age-uke can also be used offensively as a response to a single-handed grab (**Figure 4**). Trap the opponent's wrist (as in hikite) and strike the superficial branch of the radial nerve (inside upper forearm) using the free arm. As you deliver the strike, step backward into Zenkutsu-dachi (basic front stance) in order to put body weight into the strike and to position the body so that you are less vulnerable to being struck by the opponent's head. This movement will cause the opponent's head to shoot forwards and turn. The opponent's free hand will also be made to shoot backward. This will prevent the opponent from effectively delivering any rear hand strike (**Figure 5**). Age-uke is then performed. The forearm will hit the opponent's jaw as their head drops forward (be very careful in practice). This is a very powerful strike that requires little skill in the way of accuracy, because the forearm is such a large striking weapon and the opponent's predictable response is considered (**Figure 6**). When delivered with force, the opponent will be instantly incapacitated by the Age-uke.

Gedan-barai

One of the simplest applications for this technique is a low hammer fist strike. This strike could be delivered to the groin of the



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

opponent if they are upright (**Figure 7**), or to the base of the skull if they are bent at the waist (**Figure 8**).

Gedan-barai can also be used to lock the opponent's arm and position them for a follow-up strike. You have seized the opponent's wrist. Your other forearm is placed just above your opponent's elbow (**Figure 9**). The hikite (pulling hand) is turned, as in the kata, as the Gedan-barai is executed. The pressure from the forearm will be constantly against the opponent's joint and the circular motion will make the technique difficult to resist (**Figure 10**). The base

of the opponent's skull is now open to attack. As with all kata movements, there are many other applications for Gedan-barai. The ones shown are simply examples to help you to understand some of the movement's potential uses.

Soto-uke

The exact label attached to this technique varies depending upon which style is being practised. In the group to which I belong, the technique that begins on the inside and moves



Figure 10



Figure 11

outward is labelled as Soto-uke. Other styles and groups sometimes label this exact same movement as Uchi-uke because the movement starts on the inside. I shall use the terms with which I am most familiar. However, it is important for the reader to understand which movement I am referring to should they prefer using the alternative term.

Soto-uke can be used as a response to a lapel grab in a similar way to Age-uke. Take hold of the opponent's wrist and strike the superficial branch of the radial nerve (inside upper forearm) using the first part of the movement (**Figure 11**). The opponent's involuntary response will be the same as on the application for the Age-uke. The opponent's head will turn exposing the seventh cranial nerve (facial nerve) at the back of the opponent's jaw-line. Completing the Soto-uke will drive the lead knuckle of your fist into this sensitive area (**Figure 12**). This strike will damage the nerve and will cause severe pain. The blow will also cause some disorientation due to the target's close proximity to the inner ear.



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16

Soto-uke can also be used effectively when you have secured a grip on the opponent's wrist. The opponent's arm is locked as pressure is applied to their elbow joint. This will cause the opponent to bend at the waist as their head moves to one side (**Figure 13**). The opponent's hair is then grabbed and the head pulled across as the Soto-uke is completed. This movement can easily damage the neck and will leave the opponent very vulnerable to any follow-up strike (**Figure 14**).

Uchi-uke

One of the simplest uses of Uchi-uke is a response to a grab and attempted hook punch. The opponent has seized your clothing and has pulled their hand back in preparation for the punch (**Figure 15**). Seize the opponent's grabbing arm and shift forward so that you are inside the effective range of the opponent's punch. At the same time, swing your other arm outward to hopefully check the opponent's punch (**Figure 16**). It is important to understand that the primary defensive movement here is the shift inside the effective range of the punch. The checking arm is simply used to spoil the opponent's technique and is likely to shoot out anyway due to the body's instinctive reactions. The opponent is now vulnerable because one of their arms is controlled whilst the other is to the outside. The Uchi-uke is then completed so that a hammer fist strike is then delivered to the opponent's jaw-line (**Figure 17**).

Uchi-uke can also be used as a response to an attempted tackle. As the opponent moves in to tackle, drop into Zenkutsu-dachi in order to make yourself as stable as possible. At the same time, catch one of the opponent's arms and move your other arm out to the side (**Figure 18**). Complete the Uchi-uke so that forearm will be dropped onto the base of the opponent's skull (**Figure 19**). Should the opponent have built up sufficient momentum, they may still take you to the floor, even though they will be stunned. If you keep your arms in position, and continue to twist your body in the same direction



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 22



Figure 21

as the forearm strike, you will land in the scarf-hold, which will give you the advantage in any ensuing floor fight (**Figure 20**). For more details on the use of the Scarf-hold, see my book *Karate's Grappling Methods*.

Shuto-uke

The Shuto-uke is performed in a number of different ways, depending on the style of karate being practised. Regardless of the exact details, the Shuto-uke's primary purpose is to deflect and trap the opponent's arms

before delivering a disabling strike.

Throughout the katas, Shuto-uke is performed either straight or at a forty-five degree angle. As we have discussed in previous chapters, the angles at which techniques are performed are significant. First we will look at an application for the instances where the Shuto-uke is performed straight. The opponent's attempted grab is deflected and a simultaneous spear-hand strike is delivered to their trachea (Hichu) (**Figure 21**). The opponent's arm is then grabbed and they are pulled off balance as the karateka drops their body weight onto their



Figure 23

back leg. A simultaneous knife-hand strike is also delivered to the base of the opponent's skull (**Figure 22**). This technique is extremely dangerous and should only be used in the most extreme circumstances.

As mentioned earlier, many of the Shuto-uke's found within the katas are performed at forty-five degree angles. As you know, the reason the techniques are performed at an angle is to instruct the kata's practitioner that they should be at that angle, in relation to their opponent, when applying the technique. The opponent has attacked with a wild swing. The karateka shifts to a forty-five degree angle such that they are off the line of attack. As a secondary measure, both arms are brought up in order to reduce yet further the chances of the opponent's strike landing (**Figure 23**). The left arm seizes the opponent's arm and then continues to pull them in the direction of the punch so that they are off balance. A strike is then delivered to the base of the opponent's skull (**Figure 24**).



Figure 24

Both of the preceding techniques move to the inside of the opponent's arm. The next application of Shuto-uke moves to the opponent's outside. The opponent's arm has been parried across as the karateka shifts to a forty-five degree angle. This motion will prevent any follow up from the opponent and will



Figure 25

position the karateka to deliver a follow-up strike (**Figure 25**). The instant the karateka is in position, a strike is delivered to the base of the opponent's skull (**Figure 26**).

There are other ways in which all the various 'blocks' can be applied (some of which are shown elsewhere in this book). However, the examples given in this chapter should help you to look beyond the misleading labels attached to these techniques and see them for the practical and highly efficient methods they really are.



Figure 26

Chapter 14

The purpose of stances

Before we go on to discuss the purpose of the various stances, it is important to understand what the stances are **not** for! It is very common to have the stances explained as positions taken to strengthen legs or improve balance. A fundamental concept of Bunkai-Jutsu is that every kata movement is for use in combat. Whilst certain stances have physical benefits, that is not their primary function. The main function of all stances is disabling an opponent in combat.

When attempting to determine the purpose of a kata movement, one key thing that you must consider is the stance being used. In combat, the stances are used in one of two ways. The first way that stances are used in combat is to ensure the correct distribution of body weight. The use of body weight is critical if your techniques are to be successful, as all techniques should be applied using the entire body.

The second way that stances can be used in combat is the use of the physical position of the legs themselves. In this instance, the legs can be used to physically control the opponent. Before we move on to discuss the use of each stance in turn, it is important to understand the way in which the stances are assumed in combat. The word 'stance' has connotations of something fixed and immovable. In combat, however, situations are constantly changing and hence the stance should also be constantly changing. The distribution of the body weight should not be fixed, but should be constantly changing depending on the technique being employed at that time. Stances will be assumed as and when required, before instantly shifting the body weight to the next appropriate position.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

It is also important to understand that the stance itself represents the final position. When looking at the way in which the stance aids the distribution of body weight, it is the way in which the stance is assumed that is of most importance. When looking at the use of the physical position, it is the end position of the stance itself that is of most importance.

We will now move on to look at some examples of how the stances can be used in combat, both in terms of their physical position and the way in which they distribute body-weight. It is hoped that these examples will act as ‘food for thought’ and encourage you to look at other ways in which the stances can be used.

Front stance

The first technique we shall look at is an application of Gedan-barai, where the physical position of front stance is used to injure the opponent. The opponent’s arm has been slipped (**Figure 1**). Seize and pull the opponent’s arm so that their head turns and exposes the base of the skull to an elbow strike (**Figure 2**). Push the opponent’s jaw with your forearm (Muchimi) and complete the Gedan-barai motion. The opponent will fall so that their spine hits your extended front knee (**Figure 3**). Obviously this is an extremely dangerous technique and great care must be taken with it.

When assuming front stance, the body weight is projected forwards and downward. Hence, any technique that requires the body weight to be projected in this way will be performed as front stance is assumed. If we look at the following example from Pinan Nidan you can see how front stance is used to project body weight into both the arm lock and the following strike. The opponent’s arm has been seized and your



Figure 4



Figure 5

forearm has been positioned just above their elbow joint (**Figure 4**). Turn to a forty-five degree angle and perform the arm lock as described in Chapter 13 (**Figure 5**). Assuming front stance at this point will ensure that your body weight is projected through the opponent's elbow. Seize the opponent and step forward in order to deliver a strong finishing blow to the base of the opponent's skull (**Figure 6**). The step forwards and the positioning of the body (stance) will ensure that a large amount of force is projected through the strike and into the opponent.



Figure 6

Short cat stance

The opponent has been thrown to the floor in such a way that you still have control over one of their arms. Push your foot up against the opponent's back, lift your heel and assume short cat stance. Pull the opponent's arm back over your thigh in order



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

to hyper-extend their elbow joint (**Figure 7**). You'll notice how the physical position of short cat stance is used to control the opponent and to provide a fulcrum for the arm lock.

Short cat stance projects the body weight backwards and downward at a fairly sharp angle. One technique that requires such a distribution of body weight is the following wrist lock. The opponent has seized your wrist (**Figure 8**). Pin the opponent's hand with your free hand whilst quickly rotating



Figure 11

the arms. Then cut against the opponent's wrist as your hands move towards their body (**Figure 9**). Grab the opponent's forearm and pull your hands down and towards you. Assume short cat stance at the same time in order to project your body weight in the same direction as the hand movement (**Figure 10**). This will lock the opponent's wrist and force the opponent to their knees. If you try to apply the lock with the arms alone, the opponent should be able to resist the pull. However, by dropping the body weight into short cat stance, the effect of the pull is greatly multiplied. Any attempt by the opponent to resist the lock will not only be futile, but it will also result in the lock doing more damage.



Figure 12

Horse stance

You have seized the opponent's throat and stepped to the outside of their leg. Pull the opponent's arm towards you whilst pushing into their throat (**Figure 11**). Turn and assume horse stance in order to prevent the opponent from stepping around and regaining their balance (**Figure 12**). Notice how the position of the lead leg blocks the path of the opponent's leg.



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15

Horse stance can also be used to project the body-weight directly downward. The following sequence is taken from Kushanku/Kanku-Dai kata. You have moved to the outside of the opponent. Seize the opponent's arm and hair (**Figure 13**). Pull the opponent's hair and arm downward as you drop your body weight into horse stance in order to multiply the effect of the pull. This hair pull is often mislabelled as a 'vertical back-fist strike' (**Figure 14**). Control the position of the opponent's head and shift into front stance in order to deliver a powerful elbow strike to

finish (**Figure 15**).

Back stance

The straight lead leg of back stance is often used as a pivot point over which to throw the opponent. An example of this can be found in Chinto/Gankaku kata (**Figure 16**). The lead leg is thrust behind both of the opponent's legs as the lead arm is



Figure 16



Figure 17

used to push the opponent off balance. The opponent will not be able to step backward – in an attempt to regain their balance – due to the back stance blocking the path of the opponent's legs.

Back stance is also used to project the body weight backward. An example of this can also be found in Chinto/Gankaku kata (**Figure 17**). Notice how the body weight is moved in the same direction as the neck crank in order to enhance its effect.

Long cat stance

Moving into long cat stance from a standing position will drop the body downward and slightly to one side.

A technique that uses long cat stance in this way is found at the start of Pinan Nidan. The opponent has grabbed you from behind in such a way that your arms are pinned. After distracting the opponent with either a rear head-butt, stamp to the feet, reaching back and grabbing the testicles, etc, wrap your fingers around the opponent's index finger (**Figure 18**). Bend the opponent's finger back and raise your arms in order



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22

to break their grip (**Figure 19**). Assume long cat stance – which will position you so that your elbow is in line with the opponent's centre line – and deliver a rear elbow strike (**Figure 20**). Striking anywhere along the opponent's centreline is likely to do significant damage.

The position of the lead leg in long cat stance can be used to unbalance the opponent. If we look at the application for the opening sequence of Pinan Shodan/Heian Nidan show in Chapter 5, we can see that if the motion of the lock was continued, the lead leg of the long cat stance could be used to

prevent the opponent from readjusting their lead leg in order to regain their balance (**Figure 21**).

The assuming of long cat stance will project the body weight backward and downward. We saw in Chapter 13 how this movement is used to enhance the pull associated with the application of Shuto-uke (**Figure 22**).

Inner-circular stance

There are many variations of this stance depending upon the style and kata being practised. However, the common characteristic is that the knees and feet are inward, and that the weight is distributed evenly on both feet. The inner-circular stances are very stable and provide the feet with plenty of traction. Hence, inner-circular stances are often assumed within the katas when grappling techniques are being applied. The inner-circular stance can also be used to control an opponent who has been thrown to the floor. The following example is from Seishan/Hangetsu kata. Whilst the opponent is still stunned from the throw, pull upward on their arm so that the upper part of the opponent's other arm is off the floor (**Figure 23**). Put your foot on the inside of the opponent's forearm and then drag your foot back and to the side (**Figure 24**). This arching foot movement is often seen throughout the katas as inner-circular stances are assumed. The opponent's head is pushed down below your knee as their arm is pulled across. The knee of the rear leg is kept close to the opponent in order to limit their movement (**Figure 25**). The lead knee is then pushed forward as the opponent's free arm is pulled



Figure 23



Figure 24



Figure 25



Figure 26



Figure 27



Figure 28



Figure 29

back and locked over the rear thigh (**Figure 26**). This will place a lot of pressure on the opponent's neck and elbow joint and hence great care needs to be taken in practice.

The arching step commonly associated with inner-circular stances can also be used to project the body weight in such a way as to break the opponent's balance. Whilst grappling from a vertical position, quickly bring your foot inward so that it hits the inside of the opponent's foot (**Figure 27**). At this point your leg should be bent so that your knee is past your opponent's knee. Move your



Figure 30



Figure 31

body to the side as you push your knee into the side of your opponent's knee. Plant the foot firmly on the floor with the toes pointing inward (**Figure 28**). This will destroy the opponent's stability so that they can be taken completely off balance (**Figure 29**).

Reverse cat stance

An example of how reverse cat stance can be used to control an opponent while they are on the floor was shown in the chokes and strangles section of Chapter 10. It is also possible to use the leg position of reverse cat stance to control the opponent by kneeling on their head whilst barring the opponent's arm across the other thigh (**Figure 30**). The free hand can be used to strike the opponent from this position.

Reverse cat stance will project the body weight forward and down at a very sharp angle. An example of the body weight being projected in this way is found in Pinan/Heian Yodan kata. Check the opponent's hand and deliver an open hand strike to their face (**Figure 31**). Rotate your arms so that the opponent's head is forced down as shown (**Figure 32**). Knee the opponent



Figure 32



Figure 33



Figure 34



Figure 35

in the face (**Figure 33**). Extend the leg to kick the opponent in the groin (**Figure 34**). Assume reverse cat stance whilst delivering a dropping elbow strike (**Figure 35**). Moving into reverse cat stance in this way will project your body weight through the elbow strike.

It is hoped that the preceding examples will help you to better appreciate the ways in which the stances can be used to incapacitate an opponent. When studying kata applications, it is very important that the role of stance is considered.

Stances are a vital part of the techniques of the kata and their combative functions must never be overlooked.

Chapter 15

Kata-based sparring

Hironori Otsuka (founder of Wado-Ryu karate) wrote, “*Martial arts progress from kata, to kumite, to combat.*” If we wish to function effectively in combat then we need to ensure that we progress our katas, and their associated applications, into kumite (sparring). Once we have learnt to apply the techniques on a compliant training partner, we need to progress our training to include practice against opponents who resist our every action, because that is what we will be facing in reality! Applying techniques on a compliant practice partner is a world apart from applying them on an opponent who will fight tooth and nail to prevent you from doing so!

The majority of today’s karateka include ‘kumite’ in their training. However, the most commonly practised type of sparring is definitely not a progression of kata. Most modern-day dojo sparring uses different techniques, principles and strategies to those employed by the kata and is almost always based upon the rules of modern karate competition. The katas are based on the combative principles needed to survive real combat. Hence, assuming that effective fighting skills are your aim, your sparring should also be based upon those exact same principles.

It is often said that kata and kumite are the same. If your kumite is kata-based then the preceding statement is true. However, if your sparring is based on the rules of competition, then the statement is false. Please don’t misunderstand me, I’m not saying that there is anything wrong with competition karate, as I have the utmost respect for the skill and athleticism of its participants. But it must be remembered that the katas are about real fighting, and sport is not real fighting.

You must also understand that the kumite of the past is not the kumite of today. In his 1926 book *Ryukyu Karate Kempo*, Choki Motobu wrote, “*Kumite is an actual fight using many basic styles of kata to grapple with the opponent.*” From Motobu’s statement we can deduce two things. Firstly, that the katas and old style kumite included grappling (modern-day karate sparring does not). Secondly, kumite was based upon the techniques recorded within the katas. Another statement that supports the notion that kumite should be kata-based is that of Gichin Funakoshi (*Karate-Do Kyohan*), “*Sparring does not exist apart from the kata but for the practice of the kata.*” Again, the fact that kata and kumite are not separate is stressed, as is the notion that kumite is about improving your understanding of kata. Still not convinced? Chojin Miyagi (founder of Goju-Ryu) wrote in his *Karate-Do Gaisetsu* (outline of karate-do), “*Through sparring practice one may identify the practical meaning of kata.*” Again the link between kata, kumite, and effective fighting skills is emphasised.

It is clearly apparent that the masters of the past intended for our kumite to be kata-based. Even as recently as the 1960s there are references to kumite encompassing all the aspects of combat associated with the katas. In the 1967 book, *Karate: Beginner to Black Belt*, H D Plee – who was one of the pioneers of karate in Europe – wrote, “*One must not lose sight of the fact that Karate is “all-in” fighting. Everything is allowed ... This is why Karate is based on blows delivered with the hand, the foot, the head or the knee. Equally permissible are stragulations, throwing techniques and locks.*” I’d ask you to consider how ‘permissible’ a head-butt, a blow with the knee, a strangle, a throw or a lock would be during sparring in the majority of today’s dojo’s? (My guess would be “*not at all permissible!*”)

It is important that you understand the key differences between sporting kumite and kata-based kumite. Kata-based kumite will allow the participants to continue fighting regardless of the combative range in which they find themselves. Sporting kumite always begins outside kicking range and does not allow grabbing, close-range fighting or groundwork. Sporting kumite only allows a limited number of techniques. Kata-based kumite will include strikes, throws, locks, chokes, ground techniques,

etc. Sporting kumite is limited by the associated rules. Kata-based kumite is unlimited. The most significant difference, however, has to be one of intent. The aim of sporting kumite is to win tournaments. The aim of kata-based kumite is to improve and enhance real combative skills.

If you do not engage in kata-based kumite, you will be unable to apply the techniques and principles of the kata in live situations. Simply practising the katas and their bunkai, although vital, will do little to improve combative skills on their own. Like many endeavours, it is necessary to have a solid grasp of the theory, but it is also important to put the theory into practice! Kata-based sparring will develop the skills needed to freely express the principles of the kata in a live situation. It should be remembered that the katas are a physical manifestation of combative principles. In order to be a competent fighter, you will need to be able to instantaneously adapt your actions, in line with the kata's principles, to be appropriate to the situation at hand. Kata-based sparring will help you to better understand the kata's principles, and it is the only way in which you can develop the ability to effectively express those principles.

It is imperative that you practice the techniques and concepts of the kata in a fashion that is as close as possible to actual combat. Not only will this type of practice develop your technical skills, but it will also develop the correct combative mental attitudes. You will learn how to cope with fear, discomfort and self-doubt. Kata-based sparring will also develop physical fitness and confidence in your true abilities. It should be a self-evident fact that the only way to become an able fighter is to practice actual fighting! Sadly there are many that believe that simply walking through the kata is all that is required.

There are some who would argue that the techniques of the kata are too dangerous to use in sparring ... and they would be right! There are certainly some kata techniques, eye-gouges for example, that you simply can't use in sparring, but you can indicate them. There are many training methods that will allow us to develop the required skills whilst keeping the risk of injury to an absolute minimum. Before we go on to look at these training methods, I feel it is important that we discuss

general safety considerations. Obviously a lot depends upon exactly what type of kata-based sparring is being practised. However, you must understand that many of these drills require a good level of physical fitness and a solid technical background. Please get yourself checked out by a doctor, ensure all necessary safety precautions are in place and be sure you have sufficient skill before engaging in any type of kata-based sparring.

Training partner

This is undoubtedly the most important aspect of your kumite practice. You need a partner who is sufficiently able to test your skills and who will ensure that your sparring time is worthwhile. If you are winning every bout, then you should consider getting a more able partner. Remember that the aim is to improve your skills, not to feed your ego! Likewise, it is also important that your partner is capable of leaving their ego outside the dojo. Your training partner must be as committed to improving their skills as you are. It is no good if your partner misses training days or stops sparring the instance the going gets tough.

A partner who is overly excitable or unable to control their emotions should also be avoided. Many years ago I had a young man in my class who was so scared of ground-work that he would immediately lose control and go for his partner's eyes the instant the fight went to the ground! This may be acceptable in a real situation where you are in extreme danger. It would even be OK to indicate an attack to the eyes. But to actually attack the eyes during training is totally unacceptable. He was simply too scared to continue and had no interest in attempting to overcome that fear. He would even attempt to justify his actions by stating that it was the only way he could win! I explained that the aim was to learn, not 'win', and that he was putting his club mates at risk. Needless to say he doesn't train with me any more.

At the other extreme, I've also known people who just don't know when to quit! Whilst it is important to push your boundaries and not to quit at the first sign of discomfort, it is also important to take good care of yourself. Once an individual has had a solid lock, choke, etc, applied on them, it is time to

tap out, analyse what went wrong, and then start again. The type of individual who won't concede defeat when seconds away from unconsciousness or millimetres away from a dislocated joint should be avoided. Such individuals are a danger to themselves and should not be allowed to engage in sparring while that attitude persists.

You also need to ensure that your training partner is the sort of individual who cares about your safety and well-being. Whilst they should never take it easy on you, they should know when to back off if you are facing injury, etc. With my own training partners, if I were to tell them, prior to a bout, that I had previously damaged my shoulder, I have full confidence that we could fight without them ever once going near my injured joint.

You'd also be well advised to get a training partner who will provide you with good feedback. I'd have to say that much of the learning I have gleaned from my kumite has come from talking with my partners between gulps of air as we recover from the fight. Your partner can tell you what went well, what surprised them, what they saw coming, etc, and then you can use this knowledge to improve your performance next time around.

I have been extremely lucky with the people I have trained with over the years. They have all been talented, hard-working, intense, ego-less and very productive to work with (not to mention good fun as well!). Who you choose as your training partners is one of the most important decisions you will make in your kumite training. Be sure to choose well!

Supervision

All sparring should be closely supervised (one competent observer for each fighting pair). It is vital that the person supervising understands the nature of the sparring being undertaken and has a knowledge of the techniques and strategies being applied. The observer must understand all the associated risks and keep a close eye on the fight. During the rough and tumble of practice, it is possible that you may not be aware of any predicaments your partner may find themselves in. For example, you may be positioned in such a way that your partner is physically unable to tap out. The observer can

keep a close eye on you both and ensure that injury is avoided. If the observer suspects that either party is in difficulty, they should stop the fight without hesitation. The observer can also provide the combatants with feedback on how to improve their performance at the end of the bout.

Mats

Because the fight will involve throws, takedowns and ground-fighting, it is important that the fighting takes place on suitable mats. The mats should be thick enough to comfortably absorb a fall and should be secure enough so that they do not slip apart. It is also vital that the mats are in a good state of repair. I have heard it said that the use of mats should be avoided in training because you won't have any mats to fall on in the street. Whilst this is true, we should not injure ourselves so badly in the dojo that we are in no fit state to defend ourselves outside it! Suitable mats are a must if our training is to be both safe and realistic.

Protective equipment

It is vital that gum-shields, groin-guards, chest-protectors, etc, are worn during training. It is also important that suitable gloves are worn if striking is to be permitted. Because of the nature of kata-based sparring, it is important that the gloves used afford your partner protection from your blows whilst still allowing you to seize them for grappling techniques. There are many such gloves on the market today and I'd encourage you find a brand that you are personally happy with. It is also important that the feet, elbows, knees and any other striking surfaces that are to be used are also suitably padded. Head guards are also something you may wish to consider if heavier levels of contact are to be allowed.

Control

By 'control' I mean the level of actual contact that is to be allowed. Whilst heavy contact is obviously the most realistic, it is not always the most productive. You are unlikely to attempt to improve your weaker techniques, or try anything new, if you run the risk of getting hurt every time! If you are fit enough, if you are supervised, if you are wearing suitable protective

equipment and are of a high enough skill level then heavy contact sparring may be something you'd like to consider. It is undoubtedly the most realistic way to practice and it is a great confidence builder. Getting used to delivering strong blows in sparring will also help to ensure that you don't inadvertently pull your punches in real situations! However, heavy contact all the time can be counterproductive as it does little to encourage the use of weaker techniques. Sparring with control will allow you to experiment without fear of a solid blow for every mistake made.

It is very important to ensure that control is exercised on locks, chokes, etc. The techniques should be applied to the point where the opponent feels a little pain and then taps out. Locks should not be applied with force because a permanently damaged joint could easily be the result. Likewise, chokes and strangles should be applied in such a way that your partner can tap out without being injured or passing out. If you are to control your strikes, you should agree an appropriate level of contact (ensuring all relevant factors are taken into account) and then stick to it. If you've agreed to keep the contact light, then keep it light! The observer and your partner can ensure that you stick to the agreed boundaries. It is also important to limit the level of contact when striking with unpadded areas, for example head-butts. In these instances contact should be little more than a touch.

Substitution and omission

Some techniques are simply far too dangerous to be used in sparring and hence they need to be either substituted or omitted. Techniques such as strikes to the groin, kicks to the knees, neck cranks, eye gouges, biting, etc, should obviously not be allowed. However, you could substitute some of them for safer alternatives. That way the skills needed to apply and defend against such techniques are developed without running the risk of serious injury. As examples, you could touch just above the eyebrows to indicate that your partner is open to an eye-gouge, grabbing the inside leg of the trousers can be used as a substitute for groin attacks, gently nipping with the teeth can be used to show vulnerability to bites, etc. Some techniques should be omitted all together, for example neck cranks, strikes

to the throat, kicks to the groin, etc. Remember that training should be realistic, but by definition it can never be real. So some concessions need to be made in the name of safety.

Please consider all the risks when engaging in kata-based sparring and endeavour to make your training as safe as it can possibly be. Be sure to take into account all required safety precautions so that your training is realistic without being overly dangerous. Now that we have looked at the various safety requirements, we shall now move on to look at the differing ways in which the techniques and concepts of the katas can be realistically practised. We will begin by discussing some compliant drills before moving on to the various types of non-compliant sparring that are vital if the katas are to be effectively expressed in real situations.

The learning phase

While you are initially getting to grips with the application of a kata movement, it is important that the opponent offers no resistance and simply moves as the technique directs. If a mistake is made, the technique should be abandoned and then repeated whilst endeavouring to correct the initial mistake.

Once the basics of a particular technique have been understood, you should begin to practice the application while moving. After all, you are highly unlikely to remain rooted to the spot in a real situation. Hence developing the skills needed to apply a technique whilst on the move is a must. The aim of this type of practice is to acquire the basic mechanics of the movement, and it is a critical part of learning to apply the kata in real situations. However, once the basics of the movement are understood, it is vital that you reduce the amount of compliance offered by your partner. After all, an opponent in a real situation is highly unlikely to be compliant!

Continuation practice

In a real situation, it is very unlikely that every technique you use will work exactly as planned. Hence, it is important that you develop the skills needed to instantaneously change your actions so that they remain relevant to the situation. If a particular sequence of movements is no longer relevant, you should abandon or adapt the technique rather than rigidly stick

to the initial sequence. During continuation practice, you and your partner will practice a kata sequence whilst offering only a little resistance. If an error should be made then the person performing the kata technique should not stop, but should instantaneously move on to another appropriate technique. The person on the receiving end of the technique should attempt to counter and gain the advantage. After two to three seconds, the drill should be abandoned and the initial technique applied again.

If the initial technique is successful then the person who is applying it should follow that movement up with whatever action is appropriate. Again, the recipient should endeavour to counter that technique and gain the advantage. As before the continuation period should only last for two to three seconds. This drill will start to develop your ability to freely express the techniques and concepts of the kata so that you do not get locked into any fixed patterns.

Themed practice

Themed practice is rapidly practising a particular set of kata bunkai that have a common theme. For example, you may pick five differing chokes from the katas, or five throws, or five counters to grabs, etc. You will then rapidly run through all five techniques, and then your partner will apply those same five techniques against you. You will then swap sides and repeat the drill. The aim is to limit the amount of time you have to think and hence promote spontaneous action. If an error is made, you should instantaneously apply a suitable technique as in continuation practice. The aim is to keep moving with no hesitations. Should you or your partner stall, you may wish to consider the imposition of penalties, for example 20 push-ups, as an added incentive. After all, stalling in combat can have dire consequences.

Compliant sparring

In compliant sparring, both partners take it in turns to rapidly apply any techniques they wish from within the katas. The person on the receiving end does not put up a great deal of resistance and simply goes with the technique. Because your partner will not know what is coming, they are less able to

actively comply. As before, should you find the initial technique is no longer appropriate, you should rapidly move on to a more suitable manoeuvre. Once a technique has been completed, both participants should return to a neutral position. The aim of this particular drill is to encourage rapid thinking, to practice applying techniques appropriate to the situation, and to allow the practice of weaker techniques without fear of your partner's counter-attacks. There should be no hesitation between techniques.

A good way to practice compliant sparring is against the clock. For example, a two-minute period where both practitioners have to execute a minimum of twelve techniques each. This should be fairly easy to achieve if you flow from one technique to the next. If, however, there are undue hesitations, then you will run out of time. This drill can be fun to do, and it is a great way to warm up for the non-compliant sparring. However, it should be remembered that opponent's are never compliant in a real situation. It is of great importance that you progress from the compliant drills on to the non-compliant ways of practice that we are now going to discuss.

Bulling

Bulling is a basic form of sparring that is designed to improve your balance, footwork, grips and your ability to control the opponent. The participants both secure a grip on each other and then try to move the other person to a predetermined spot on the dojo floor. You will quickly learn that raw strength is nowhere near as efficient as sensitivity and the skilful manipulation of your partner's movements. The main aim of bulling is to introduce the student to some of the sensations associated with grappling. In my own dojo, we also use bulling as part of our warm-up routine.

Grip and lift

This is a drill that will allow you to practice and counter the various grips associated with the katas. Both participants start a few feet apart with their hands by their side. The aim is simply to grip your partner around the waist and lift both their feet off the floor. As you try to lift your partner, you will also have to counter your partner's attempts at securing a grip around your

own waist. This will help to develop your gripping skills, which are critical if you wish to be able to apply many of the techniques found within the katas.

Stand up

One participant lies on the floor whilst the other one attempts to hold them down. The aim of the person being held is to get up onto their feet, and the aim of the other person is to prevent them from doing so. If the person being held should get to their feet, then they are declared the winner. If, after a predetermined amount of time has elapsed, the person is still on the floor, then the one doing the holding is declared the winner. It should be remembered that in a real situation, the amount of time spent on the ground must be kept to an absolute minimum. This form of practice will help you to develop the required skills.

Striking only

In this type of sparring, both participants can only strike. The amount of contact allowed depends upon the skill and physical condition of the participants, and protective equipment being used. It should be remembered that we are talking about kata-based sparring, and hence it should be the methods recorded within the katas that we should be using. We should use knees, elbows, head butts, kicks to the thighs, etc, (in such a way that safety is always maintained) and the fight should take place at close-range. We should not exaggerate the distance and begin using high kicks, etc, as in Shiai kumite (competition sparring).

Striking and grips

As above, except that this time you may also seize the opponent in order to position them for strikes and to prevent them from striking you. An interesting variation is to have one participant who can only strike, and the other one must seize the opponent in order to prevent themselves from being struck. Either way, no throws, locks, chokes etc. are allowed. This is a good drill to develop close-range control as discussed in Chapter 6.

Throws only

For this type of sparring, both participants start a couple of feet apart. On the observer's signal to begin, both participants will attempt to throw the other to the ground. A clean throw is fairly difficult to achieve and should both participants hit the floor together, as is often the case, then the bout is declared a draw. The participants should then regain their feet and start again. If your partner should find themselves on the floor, whilst you are still on your feet, then you are the winner and vice-versa. This drill will improve your ability to apply and counter throws. It will also improve your ability to take the opponent to the ground with you should your balance be broken.

Throws and strikes

As 'throws only,' except the use of strikes is now permitted. It should be remembered that striking is always the preferred option in a real situation. Hence, striking should also be the preferred option in training. If your strikes create the opportunity for a throw, then take it, but don't go looking for throws in the first instance. If heavy contact is to be used, then the winner is the one who manages to take the other off their feet, either through being knocked down by the strikes, or through the application of a throw. If control is to be applied, a ruling on what strikes will be classed as winning blows should be made, for example 'three head punches in a three-second period'. The observer should then declare the winner when that requirement is met or a successful throw is executed.

Groundwork

Both participants sit back to back on the floor. On the observer's signal they will turn and wrestle for position. Neither participant is allowed to stand up. The winner is the one who can get their partner to submit by using the techniques of the kata. All locks, chokes, strangles, etc, are permitted. The use of strikes can also be allowed depending upon what areas the participants are wishing to develop. It is important that the observer keeps a close eye on the fight in case either participant should find themselves in difficulty.

Grappling

All of the grappling techniques of the kata are allowed (excluding neck cranks etc). Both participants start from a standing position and may use throws, chokes, strangles, locks, ground techniques, etc. The winner is determined by submission. In order to prevent the participants from opting to go to the ground to get a submission, which would be a foolish thing to do in reality, the following rule should be applied. If one participant is prone, whilst the other is upright, then the one who is upright may win the fight with a single controlled kick to their partner's body. For a detailed discussion on how you can spar using the grappling techniques of the kata, I would ask you to consult my book, *Karate's Grappling Methods*.

Limited sparring

In this type of sparring, one or both of the participants is given a limitation, for example one can only kick; one can only strike, the other can only grapple; one can only win with arm locks, the other can only win with chokes, etc. The variations are endless. This drill is particularly useful for developing your weaker areas. It is also a good way to learn about the strengths and limitations of the various methods.

All-in

This type of sparring is the most realistic and demanding. 'All-in' sparring should only be attempted by those in excellent health and who have a high enough skill level. Strikes, throws, chokes, strangles, locks, groundwork, etc, are all allowed. The participants begin from a standing position and then fight until either the allotted time expires, there is a win via a submission or the observer stops the fight. If one fighter should be prone then the fighter who is standing may deliver a single controlled kick to the opponent's body to win the match. No hard stamps should be delivered whilst training due to the inherent dangers of such methods. As before, if the blows are to be controlled then the fighters should agree beforehand which ones will be classified as stopping blows. If the fighters have sufficient skill and appropriate protective equipment, then the blows can be delivered with more force. Obviously no blows should be aimed at the groin, throat, etc.

Practising your katas and their applications on a compliant partner, although very important, will do little to improve your ability to defeat a non-compliant opponent in a real situation. It is vital that you progress your training so that you practice the application of the kata's techniques and principles in a realistic way. If effective combative skills are your aim, then you must ensure that you make the drills and sparring methods described in this chapter a regular part of your training.

Chapter 16

Conclusion

Throughout this book we have looked at the various aspects of the combative application of the karate katas. Although we discussed each part in isolation, it is very important to understand that the subdivisions of Bunkai-Jutsu cannot be separated in practice. It is the integrated use of all the methods recorded within the katas that will lead to victory in actual combat.

It is hoped that reading this book has helped to increase your understanding of the principles and concepts upon which the katas are based. A good understanding of these concepts will help you to interpret the combative function of individual movements within the katas. Knowledge of the concepts upon which the katas are based will also help you to freely express the katas in live situations.

It is vital that you research your own unique way of expressing the katas. The concepts upon which the katas are based are constant and must be adhered to, but the way in which these concepts are expressed should be unique to you. Every one of us is different. Hence, it stands to reason that our individual expressions of



Group Photo (left to right): Murray Denwood, Jim Hopkins, Peter Skillen (illustrator), Fred Moore, Iain Abernethy (author), Craig Strickland, Gary Herbert, Rob Gate

the katas will also be different. It is hoped that you will build upon the concepts discussed within this book to create your own unique expression of Bunkai-Jutsu.

I'd like to finish by thanking you for purchasing this book and for taking the time to read it. Your support of my endeavours is greatly appreciated.

Iain Abernethy

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